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IN SEARCH OF A HUSBAND

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"JOY"

IN SEARCH OF A HUSBAND

by

CORRA HARRIS

Author of
"The Recording Angel"

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TO MY FATHER

IN SEARCH OF A HUSBAND

In Search of a Husband

CHAPTER ONE

ONE year after I had finished living it, this story was written — in a quiet place where thinking is a process of Nature, no more a labour of the mind than the springing of the grass was a labour of the earth in the morning and evening of the great Second Day. That grass — it was the Scriptures of the soil. And this story is also the Scriptures of a woman's heart. The worth of it is not the goodness nor the badness of the woman, but the veracity of the record.

If the gentle reader, the little old fragrant minded gentle reader with spectacles upon her nose and white ruffs at her wrists — if the poor old bald-headed, wattled jowled general reader in the smoking compartment of the Pullman car is alarmed at the serious monotone of this preface, let both of them take heart. This is not one of those anthologies of griefs, called a "Confession," sometimes written by a woman who has fallen into the objective case of matrimony, and who becomes the heel-stinging serpent of a cruel and

neglectful husband. It is a narrative of adventure, of secretly daring exploits, achieved with many hardships and even with tears, but not with the blinding futile tears of the woman in the objective case. I am the heroine of it, and the scenes are laid in my own heart where every man and every woman is an outrageous egotist. Every man will recognize me, because men always know the woman best who conceals her identity and reveals herself. And every woman will deny me by the same token — because, while every woman knows the truth about herself, even if she has not lived much of it, nothing in this world or the next will induce any one of them to believe it all, much less acknowledge it. I should not be recording it myself if I were not sure that discovery is impossible. We are recognized by the truth we speak about others. That is the nom de plume behind which we get more respectably through life. But when we tell it about ourselves, we become anonymous. We are strangers to our dearest friends. Our own mother will declare that she never knew us. Our very guardian angels will become confused in auditing the account of our deeds and dreams. This I say is my perfect disguise. I have written in these pages the truth that many a woman lives, and which no woman admits. My purpose in writing it is honourable, which is more than the

woman who writes confessions in the objective case can claim if she searched honestly to the bottom of her mind for the motive. When you are in the objective case and limited by your female gender, you are apt to write accusatively of somebody else, which is never really honourable even if you tell the truth. I believe if every man and every woman was compelled by law to hand in to a Biographical Bureau an anonymous but veracious autobiography of his or her life, we should come into immediate possession of a great humanistic encyclopedia of information that would revolutionize the economics of civilization. And we should come into possession at last of a great literature, more veracious than any history, nobler than Homer's epic, and having in it those elements which have made the Bible the one living book. For the heart of man is the one Bible made by God. In the very least of these you may find everything from the Garden of Eden to sweeter psalms than David ever sang — all goodness, all evil, every prophecy and all the Gospels even to Revelations.

This story that I have written falls far short of that great standard, because words do not reveal us, because circumstances minify us, and sometimes enhance us too much, because even when we have done our best and our durndest, so much of

life that really belongs to us remains in the subjunctive mood. We cannot achieve it. It remains forever there — what we might, could, would or should have been. I think it proves our immortality — that it is our immortality — that subjunctive mood!

. . . . . .

Millidge is the capital of this State, a drowsy, dirty, green-bowered southern city which lies sprawling in the sun with its heels upon the front veranda. One of those old towns common to the South, where most of the best people have lost their fortunes, and where some not so good have had the impudence to make fortunes — always at the expense of the nobly indigent and indignant best people.

Forest Avenue is the fashionable thoroughfare of it, so named from the row of original forest trees which still stand in it, anywhere, some along the sidewalk, some in the middle of the street. It begins a decent distance from where the rich upstarts have built the business centre of the town, stretches sunbaked and mottled with leaf shadows for a mile, and ends where it should end at the gates of the park. The residences on either side are old, dingily magnificent and set far apart upon wide lawns. Cats that look as if they had never

been disturbed sun themselves upon the veranda banisters, sparrows are always rising in whirlwinds of dusty wings from the pavement before automobiles or old-fashioned carriages with spotted dogs trotting nearly underneath behind, or slowly moving teams. There is no hurry anywhere, merely the bobbing parasols of pretty women upon the sidewalks, or leisurely striding men who carry canes and wear elderly silk hats, even in the morning.

Three blocks from the entrance of the park there is an old gray stone house, set a trifle farther back than the other residences upon a lawn shaded by two enormous elm trees. It is very large, very imposing. The Gothic windows are long and narrow and extremely pointed at the top, as if they were lifting their eyebrows at the world. The helmet-shaped roof rises into an ugly scalloped top tower. There is no veranda, which is a distinction. The arched double doors of massive oak sunken deep into the front wall are always closed, as much as to say,

"The people who live here are not at home to those who walk in the street."

That was true when they were hung, some time in the early '40's. But now it is not the truth.

Twenty-eight years ago I was born in this house, in a very large room which overlooks a ragged garden in the rear. I have been told that it was

not ragged then. It lay within the boxwood hedge with every bed as trimly defined as the fronts and backs and underarm gores of a lady's basque pattern. Mother did not understand flowers, but she did understand basque patterns. And she applied what she knew of the one to what she did not know of the other. The result was a kind of sweet-williams' neatness and precision in the garden.

But it is not so remarkable to be born. So many people have had the same early experience that I should not mention it if it were not for a certain distinguishing circumstance. I was born with a kiss upon my lips. No one suspected it at the time, least of all mother, who was a good woman with an inbred suspicion of all kissing. But for me, it made the whole difference in destiny. It saved me and blessed me.

The point I am trying to make is this, that any one, a man, even the ugliest woman alive, may be born with a "golden spoon" in his or her mouth, as the saying goes, but there is only one kind of being who can come into existence with her lips wreathed for kissing. That is a woman whom men will love. Let her be ever so good, or ever so bad, this has nothing to do with it, they will love her, because she is herself, she is predestined for that as the rose is to bloom.

The whole affair was unexpected and something of a scandal, I believe — my being born at all. Mother was far gone in her forties. Father was over fifty, and my brother Francis was already a young man. I was one of those postscripts which Nature sometimes adds to distressed families. It seems that I was kept in concealment, that mother regarded me as a late and undeserved affliction, that father considered me one of his many transgressions. I teethed in private, crawled down the back steps as soon as I could, and devoted myself silently and warily to the inspection of doodle holes in the walks of the garden. No one really welcomed me except a certain very fat elderly woman, whose name I could not pronounce until after I was six years old. This was Mrs. Buckhaulter. Father was the senior member of the law firm of Marr and Buckhaulter, and Mrs. Buckhaulter was a girlhood friend of mother's who persisted and who gradually transferred her affection to me, partly because she had no children, and partly, no doubt, because I was an engaging child. I was called "Joy." I was christened Mary Joy! But the Mary is silent. It is the name of my ghost whose adventures the angels record, and they will not happen in these pages.

Mrs. Buckhaulter was my godmother. And

from the first she poked the pudgy finger of her affection into every crucial moment of my life. She was very short, very homely, one of those women who change when they are thirty, become good, simple, and fat, and do not change any more at all. She was the tutelary deity of my childhood. I had so much confidence in her that I permitted her when I was seven to tie one end of a string about one of my small front teeth, which was loose, the other end to a door knob, and slam the door! The result did not shake my faith in her. There is a picture taken of me about this time. It shows a little saucer-faced girl in a pinafore with wooden looking legs and a wide smile upon my kissing mouth which artlessly confessed the missing tooth.

Mother died when I was still a child. My recollections of her are all of the same kind. She was a sad woman. The fiery furnace was her native heath. I do not remember ever seeing her enjoy anything. She fades in and out of the door of that dim past, a small, black-robed woman who was in perpetual mourning for our relations. We had been very rich before the Civil War. Afterward we were poor, and by this time we were very poor. Mother was always saving something, always striving desperately to make ends meet that did not meet. She was a kind of

uman mothball. She did her best to disinfect ather of his natural transgressions, and to preerve me from my instincts. She had a perfect ady's horror of instincts, and father went about s long as she lived camphorated, smelling ludicously to Heaven of her virtues, not his own sins, hich he modestly concealed from her. Francis, ho was already well started upon his successful usiness career was her chief comfort. I was her nief anxiety, wayward, silent, but blowing where listed. She believed that I was going to "take fter father." She sometimes said so, dolefully, Mrs. Buckhaulter, who always laughed and atted me on the head. I did not know what nother meant, but she was right. I did take fter father. I do not think I inherited anyning from her but my gender. I became the ind of woman who descends more particularly om the male line — in whom femininity is a rce, not a tremor, and charm is an intelligence, t a passing phase of youth.

After mother's death there was a succession of aiden aunts imported by father for the purpose bringing me up. I was the daughter of the ouse. I belonged to one of the best families. resently I should be obliged to take my place the social world of Millidge. It was important at I should learn manners and the Ten Com-

mandments. Both because I was a girl, not a boy.

I will not go into the particulars of this period. It lasted until I was sixteen, and old enough to enter the one fashionable school for young ladies in the city.

The aunts resigned their positions of trust voluntarily and always in high dudgeon. They do not count for much in these scriptures, they affected me so little.

After the departure of the last one, I became the nominal mistress of the house. It was like a cemetery which lies in a deep shade and is never really disordered. The carpets were threadbare. The furniture was too massive to be moved about, at least I never thought of moving it then. Some of the rollers were gone, some of the legs disabled. The old hat rack in the hall leaned like a monument that has sunken a little on one side into the earth. The sideboard in the dining-room stood slipshod. The davenports in the parlour were never pulled from their august places against the wall. It would have been fatal. They had no bowels. Their springs protruded. We simply moved about among these things as the living move among the gravestones of the dead. This is what our furniture really was. We had inherited it from the magnificent past.

About this time I also located father and Francis in my order of things, a fact which had so much to do with my own position that it is impossible to raise the curtain upon this drama until I have defined them both.

Father is not very good. But Francis is that dangerous thing, a rising young business man. He is vice-president of the First National Bank of Millidge. Of the two men, however, father is the more admirable, not morally, but really. That curious distinction is sometimes to be made when this term is applied to men.

Father always reminds me of an old cavalry sword. It is his head which suggests this comparison — a splendidly carved affair, as if Nature had become a goldsmith in the effort to produce a countenance which proclaims every honour, all the firmness and strength that he does not really possess. No matter where he is, under conditions however complimentary or embarrassing, he always appears immeasurably superior to them. On this account he is the figurehead of all public functions and of every important occasion in Millidge. He is invariably chosen to introduce the "speaker of the evening." Millidge is given to speakers. And quite innocently he invariably makes this person, whoever he is, appear insignificant by comparison to his own golden eagle

presence. Without having been actually elected, he is the "official orator" of Millidge.

Francis is proud of him, and despises him. He is proud of Francis and entertains, at the same time, a noble contempt for him. I love father, and I suffer from an overwhelming sense of obligation to Francis. He makes me think of that Scripture which has something to say about, "Just men made perfect." He has never been overtaken in a fault. I do not say that he has never committed any. I believe he has, but he has never been discovered in one — which is a suspicious evidence. With his lean figure, his dark, thin, clean-shaven face and his high, irritable voice, he became the overwhelming virtue in the house before which father and I grovelled from force of circumstances.

Father plays poker or something at the Club — enough to lose what he earns from his practice. It requires courage to lose. He has it. And Francis has not got it. If the bank should fail, he would be ruined. He could never recover himself. But no chance of cards or Fate could ruin father. When he is reduced to his last penny he is never so low in spirit that he cannot conscientiously risk his imaginary integrity enough to recoup himself out of Francis' tight pockets. He borrows five hundred dollars of him and gives his note for it,

which he never pays. Nothing would induce him to do this if he did not believe he could and would pay some time in the future. The future is the only dividend he has ever declared.

It was in this dim old house with these two men that I grew up and acquired myself without those nice scruples of my sex which I might have had if mother had lived. I was the one live kernel in it, a little seed fallen in the soil of desire in a dark place.

When I was twenty I resolved to marry, when I did marry, a rich man — not a tall man, nor a fair one, nor a dark one, but a man who could afford the establishment and luxuries I craved but did not have.

I reached this decision without advice or coercion. It was the logic of being myself, of having been born with a kiss on my lips, and of having inherited a split silk nature from ancestors who spent wealth that they did not earn.

At this time I had a face like a clock which marks the hour of sunrise, so round it was, so fair, so radiant of the day to come. I was what may be called the "dear" size in women, slender, but not too tall. My hair was the colour of tarnished brass, not quite golden, but abundant. I had wide, inquiring hazel eyes, a nose which turned up enough to snub Fate, a white throat, shoulders a

trifle too square — and no bosom at all. I was merely a little thin-flanked verb-to-be, one of those pretty virgin adventuresses who are, after all, the greatest adventuresses in this world, because, being good, they have no conscience about how they attain the ends they seek.

I was just out of school. But I did not know anything along the way I had chosen to go. Least of all did I know myself. And to be innocent of one's self is to be innocent indeed. It is the foundation of that unscrupulousness which is often most highly developed in the virgin woman.

I spent much time before my mirror acquiring the knowledge I needed. There is no truth, no charm, no grace, scarcely a possible vice, however hidden beneath lips and brow, however deeply concealed from others that a woman may not discover in herself and learn to use from studying her own image in the glass. I applied myself to the proper interpretation of this little primer face with the attention which philosophers give to miracles.

Looking back at this period I am inclined to the belief that most girls entering society begin their careers by entertaining the Devil unawares. It is the only innocent way to do it, and women are the most consciencelessly innocent beings created. They prepare ardently and sweetly for the fall of

nen in love, not for their own. They plan con-uests. They are the born kleptomaniacs of nen's hearts.

Thus, over and above the predestined rich hus-and, I determined to be loved by lovers. I was n no haste to be married. I was about in the same nood that a coward is in when in a rash moment e challenges a brave man to a duel. He wants o fight, he knows that he must fight, but, dear Heavens! how he fears the sword of his adversary. When driven to it, wit consists in fencing, if not in wounding him to the death. In matters of love his is called coquetry, an art in which I was estined to acquire a marvellously limber wrist.

This was what I was and meant to be at the age f twenty, and what most girls are, dear mankind. Their modesty is their armour, their beauty is their word. And you advance upon them with no rotection at all save your egotism, which is your eakness. I could laugh and I could weep at he comedies and the tragedies which result rom this misunderstanding. We do not get the est of it, but we get the best of you. This comes f entertaining the Devil unawares, of being so weetly conscious of our angels all the while that hey show through like dim presences in us to you.

CHAPTER TWO

THE old house was not exactly renovated about this time, but the shades were lifted from windows long dark. The light streamed into the dim parlour for the first time since I could remember. Francis had the davenports mended, and a few legs and rollers restored where they were most needed. And I created a living-room out of the library. This was a small room, like a ruby set in dark, glistening, brown wood, with its high wainscoting and its shelves of many-coloured books. The rugs lay upon the polished floor as faded as autumn leaves, worn threadbare by the tread of many feet. There were half a dozen rusty armchairs with sagging leather cushions that always stood in a semi-circle before the open fireplace in the red brick chimney, like grave old men in council. Above the mantel a very ancient mahogany clock hung with a terribly aloof stare, the hands widely stretched between the minutes and the hours. The pendulum swung with great deliberation, and it ticked as solemnly as if it were making a gospel of time — a poor old preacher whom nobody heeded. There

was a large library table, pushed back against the wall between the two front windows. It was always littered with magazines and papers, and was inhabited by a desk telephone which from time to time played an important part in these adventures. Father kept a scandalous old pipe and a jar of "Lone Jack" tobacco on the mantel. And Francis kept something, father and I never knew what, locked in a small cabinet in one corner. Whatever it was, it was the skeleton in his closet. He never went near it when we were in the room.

It was here, except upon a few grander occasions, when I was obliged to use the parlour, that I had my social being, gave little tea parties, and engaged in the romantic duelling which comprised so large a part of my adventurous career.

Late in autumn after I was twenty in June, Colonel and Mrs. Buckhaulter gave a ball in my honour, which marked my formal début into society.

The Buckhaulters are the capital letters of Millidge society. You may enter the town through the railway station, or by automobile, or even in a market wagon, but I have never known any one to enter the best society there except through the doors of their double parlours, not to stay in after these doors were closed to them.

The great occasion filled me with excitement.

I wore a white brocade satin, much too stately for my youth and slimness. But it became me like a prophecy, and was almost a gracious gift from Francis.

I was the first of the younger guests to arrive.

The rugs had been removed from the parlours, the waxed floors shone like amber ice. The chairs, tables, and sofas set back against the walls, where long mirrors reflected and doubled the spaces, multiplied every palm and vase of flowers and me, as I advanced to where the Buckhaulters sat at the end of the room talking with father and the Leighs and the Gillfillings — all older men and women who had come early enough to dine with their hosts. Mrs. Buckhaulter sat a little part from the others between father and her husband. She was now long past middle age, ridiculously corpulent, with prominent eyes beneath wrinkled lids, a pendulant underlip, and arched wrinkles on her forehead that lifted her face into an expression of perpetual interrogation. She wore a black gown elaborately trimmed with brilliant passementerie and with tassels that hung from her draperies like the ends of guy ropes which might be needed any time to draw her in. Colonel Buckhaulter was a replica of father, shorter, much stouter, and a shade less dignified in his bearing.

"How, now, Anne of Gierstien?" he exclaimed,

rising as I approached. "Where is your falcon? With that expression so willful, with those bright locks, ready to fly or fall in the chase, you should have worn a hawk upon your wrist."

"Don't worry the child, Marcellus," protested Mrs. Buckhaulter. "You may be sure she has the bird hooded somewhere. You are charming, my dear, in that white gown. You look like a young heirloom of love."

She gathered herself up from the sofa with an effort and drew me to one side.

"Where is Tommy?" she asked.

"I left him in the hall, looking at himself in the mirror of the hat rack," I replied, laughing.

"Quite right. Do not waste your time on college boys. They do not count. A young woman should begin by placing her accent over the right man's head."

The youth she referred to was Tom Redding, a student in Millidge University, and the brother of Alice Archibald of whom you shall hear more presently.

"You know Emmet Marshall?" Mrs. Buckhaulter went on.

"Oh, yes," I answered with studied indifference.

He was the richest young man in Millidge. Beneath the modest exterior of my maidenliness I had him in mind.

"He is coming alone to-night," she said, looking about her with a preoccupied air. "Your brother Francis will bring Mrs. Derry."

I understood her perfectly and showed it by changing the subject.

"The flowers are gorgeous!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, they are. It is a good omen, Joy. The début of a popular girl is the only occasion except a fashionable funeral when friends are so generous about sending flowers," she agreed, wrinkling her face into a smile of satisfaction as she resumed her seat upon the sofa.

"Have you seen Alice? She promised to come early," she inquired after a pause.

"No, she was not in the dressing-room upstairs," I answered. "There is no counting upon Alice. She may not come at all."

"Oh, yes! She will come," she retorted dryly. "Still you are right. When a woman elopes to get married, there is no counting upon how she will do what she does!"

Alice and I had been friends at school. She was two years older, and just before the final examinations in her senior year she shocked Millidge, which is old-fashioned and given to formal church weddings, by eloping one night with Charlie Archibald. Thus she avoided the examinations, the only excuse she never gave for the escapade.

Until the day these adventures ended, she remained my most intimate friend. And she was the cruelest enemy of my happiness. I would have given much to have been rid of her. Doubtless she felt the same toward me. We hated each other with a kind of sacred hatred. Yet we appeared to be horribly necessary to each other. Women are like that, and men are not. We were two Judases who loaned and borrowed each other's jewels and furs, and who stole one another's lovers. We had moods of affection in which we confided our secrets, the one to the other! And all unconsciously, far within, even while we clasped hands and gazed at each other through tears of tenderness, we made notes of these confidences to use at some future time, the one against the other.

I stood now beside Mrs. Buckhaulter, idly regarding the roses in my bouquet, waiting for her, looking forward to her coming, happily unaware that I was waiting for the real adversary against whom I should draw the sword many a time.

"There she is now!" said Mrs. Buckhaulter.

I turned and moved back toward the door through which Alice and her young husband were entering. He was tall and dark with a grave face, in which the eyes of a hero burned, like one who

looks from a besieged tower upon the enemy and is not dismayed. The time came when we stood together in that place and looked down at Alice.

She was one of those "glorious blondes" who are born to a doubtful reputation on account of the corn-tassel fairness of their hair, their supernal complexion, their divine tallness, and their lyre-shaped bodies. These are the outward tokens of a dangerous nature which time usually confirms with their actual deeds.

The two hurried forward, Alice a little in advance of her husband. She was as vivid as a flame, her blue eyes lifted like banners, her hair glistening brighter than gold, her brow too white, her cheeks too red, the turquoise gown she wore too blue, even beneath its cloud of lace. She should have been named "Circe," and she was called "Alice." It was like labelling a cartridge of dynamite "Cold Cream."

"Joy, darling, what a happy occasion! and how lovely you are in that brocade! It is like you, very fine and very sweet!" she cried, extending her pretty, slender hands in greeting.

"And here is Charlie," she went on. "He declares he must have the first waltz with you. I have told him he may dance with you to-night, but not with the other girls. One must keep a careful hand upon one's husband," she laughed.

"May I have it, Miss Marr?" he asked.

"Of course you may!" I answered, offering my card.

"You see I came early to avoid the rush, to make sure of my chance," he said politely as he wrote his name.

I was sure in my mind that Alice planned the compliment to me, and that he would have preferred to dance that first number with her. She was a woman who created a morbid passion even in her own husband.

The house was filled now with chirruping young voices. Presently a stream of girls and their escorts flowed down the staircase into the parlours — all the débutantes of the season and a dozen older ones left over from other seasons. There was a mincing of small feet, the inexperienced whisking of trains as they came rapturously toward me. Then it was:

"Oh, Joy!" and ——

"Ah! Joy!" and ——

"Jolly" (which was a nickname I had at school). "This beats our Belmew soirées, doesn't it?"

A rich young bass voice broke in:

"Miss Marr, you remember me, Chan Peters, fellow that met you last June at the commencement reception. I ——"

"No, of course she does not! I was there

myself that night. Don't say you have forgotten poor Bunk Hopgood, Miss Marr!"

"Hist! the enemy approaches," growled Chan Peters. "Retire, fair maidens! conceal yourselves beneath the foliage! Look in the doorway!"

Every eye was focused upon the figure of a young man entering the room. His shoulders were broad, his form immense, his legs were like inverted masts around which his trousers were reefed.

"Look at his head, please, how he carries it, as if it did not belong to him," whispered one of the girls.

"Don't, inherited it. Grandfather was an Irishman. Some snorty nose, some bulldog mouth," answered Bunk Hopgood, while Chan, waiting until the back of his victim showed far down the room as he neared the Buckhaulters, stepped forth, bowed gravely, and in the sepulchral voice of a butler announced:

"Mr. Robert Emmet Marshall! Professional lady-killer of Millidge. I warned you to hide. Now I leave you to your fate. Nothing can save you!"

The chorus of giggles that followed was interrupted.

"Here comes the other one!"

A small man entered and frisked waggishly

toward the company upon the sofa. His thin, light hair hinted baldness. His equally thin moustache was waxed and turned up at the ends like the quotation marks of a jest. His face was the jest. It was narrow, pale, with a receding chin, and prominent eyes rendered more prominent by eyeglasses from which dangled a black cord. He held his head up as if it were his personal pronoun.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I present the Honourable Charles Augustus Brown!" hummed Chan, in the oratorical tone of one who introduces a celebrity, "Speaker of the State Senate, candidate for reëlection ——"

"Rising fast in his own estimation," interrupted Bunk Hopgood. "Got a mortal antipathy for every man's ideas but his own. Advance one, he rushes out, barks furiously at it intellectually, then retires to the door-mat of his own mind, rolling his eyes and growling. Made a tremendous reputation on the floor of the House this way ——"

"Look here, Hop, you are introducing him, or am I doing it?" protested Peters.

"Go on! State the worst!" said Bunk, subsiding like a bellows from which the wind has been suddenly forced.

"As I was about to explain before this unseemly interruption," Chan began again, glaring

indignantly at Hopgood, "the Honourable Augustus Brown is a widower. Wants to get married. Fine opportunity for any deserving young woman. But must be deserving. First Mrs. Brown was a saint — is a saint, I mean. Deserved everything, got nothing — but Brown, and her present tombstone — preferred the latter."

So the hour passed while the guests assembled, adding stout elderly men and women to the host's party, seated at the end of the great room, and many young ones to the groups standing here and there upon the floor.

Every ball is a masked ball. The men and women who attend such functions do not appear in their real characters. They come disguised in the ideal of themselves. And I could not have been more effectively disguised if I had actually appeared in the character of Anne of Gierstien. No one could have known my heart from studying my face. It was the radiant, open countenance of the ingénue. I was a slim young being, bent upon achieving my first adventure with you, dear mankind. You always see me at balls, the girl so demure, with the loop of her train over her arm, with her very décolleté slippers showing more of her silk stockings than you think she is aware of, standing somewhere in the thickest of the encircling throng, where the laughter is

gayest, and the sound of many voices covers her silence as she lifts her eyes inquisitively to yours above the hubbub as if she asked:

"What is it? What is this secret between us, between just you and me; not these others?"

Then she quickly averts them as if she reconsidered and pleaded:

"No, do not tell me yet! I will not believe it yet, though you avowed it upon your knees."

And the man she addresses thus is always to inform her. That is his particular privilege. He is the only one who can, and he knows it. He signals the information over the shoulder of the lady he is supposed to be attending. But she will not see him. She has passed the same inquiry shamelessly to the ugly, red-faced man beside him. She is no respecter of persons in this matter. She is the little feminine collector of customs for Love. She will have each of you pay your duty. She goes again through the same semaphore dialogue with him that she has first gone through with the other, and with the same evasion. She will not have it yet from him either, this secret that she knows already. It is one of the things women never will acknowledge except in the last extremity of courtship. Still, she will make every one of you, from Adonis to Caliban, signify to her that you have it ready

on command, this tariff. It isn't true, of course, and she isn't true either. You have both simply gone through the parody of a great transaction. Flirting, at bottom, is an awful sacrilege, because it blasphemes that Holy Ghost in us, *Love*, the noblest, most significant of all human passions, from which the rest spring like branches of the true vine.

Over and over again the group about me formed and dissolved each time leaving fewer girls and more men, for which I was femininely thankful. No woman likes to divide the attentions of the men about her with other women. She is an everlasting monogomist. Besides, I discovered in this withdrawal of the other girls the victory of my own charm. I came to myself, fully endowed with every fascination I possessed. I laughed at Bunk Hopgood when he signalled imploringly for a rose from my bouquet.

"No, Mr. Hopgood," I replied, "I am keeping it to remind me of you!"

"Oh, Lord! she is going to be the most dangerous of them all!" he sighed despairingly to the ceiling.

I saw Emmet Marshall approaching, shouldering his way through the long-legged circle about me, towering above it, his face set in a smile, his eyes fixed banteringly upon me. I lowered mine, and lifted my fan like a fluttering wing to my

breast. I did not know what my lips were for till that moment. They are capable of expressing the entire ritual of womanhood, from her creed to the song of Ruth. I felt little Cupid devils slip through and work industriously, mischievously lifting the corners of my mouth, I knew that some sad good angel was calling sweet attention to this maiden's brow. That is a sense of contradiction and guilt which every woman about to become beautiful endures gladly.

He bowed low before me, a little mockingly, then setting his back to the company as if it had been a mere wall, he plucked deliberately, challengingly at my fan.

"So! this is Anne of Gierstien, I hear. The old bucks down there at the end of the room with your hostess are raving about you, Madam. Great victory — to stir the embers in old men's hearts. But let us away, Anne! I hear the bugles, I smell the thyme upon the hills! Come! we will to the saddle and have a chase before the dance begins. Is that the way you are accustomed to being addressed by your naked-kneed, kilt-clad laird, or am I too gentle? I forget how Annes were managed in the Highlands of your day. Must I puff out my manly bosom and blow a blast upon the horn? Where is my horn?" He slapped his sides in dismay not to find it.

"Oh! yes, the gilly has it. There was a red-topped gilly, wasn't there? Bunk"— he looked around at Hopgood's brilliant head —"you can be the gilly. Blow your horn again, beat this cover, while this fair lady and I take our ease upon yonder bank. Flush everything but us."

He made as if to lead me to a corner where the palms and ferns half concealed a sofa.

"No, Mr. Marshall," I exclaimed, "that was Margaret Derry's horn you heard! There she is over by the piano waiting for you."

A whoop of laughter greeted this retort. He was known to be very attentive to Mrs. Derry, who was making her début as a young widow that season.

"Well, give me a dance then, two of them, and a waltz," he laughed as he took my card and wrote his name opposite three numbers.

"Don't be greedy, Emmet! the rest of us want to dance with Miss Marr. You have not left enough to go around," complained Chan Peters.

"But enough!" he retorted audaciously, taking his departure. "I must go and head off the Honourable Augustus Brown. He has signed up with every débutante in the room, except you, Miss Marr, and he has been struggling to get past your guard here all the evening." He wagged his head ominously at the figure of the little

widower who was clipping across the floor in our direction.

By the time he reached us every number was taken.

"Horribly disappointed, Miss Marr," he said, staring disgustedly at my card. "Old friend of your father's been waiting for this occasion for — for a year. Wanted to begin our better acquaintance with a dance when you came out."

This was greeted with a scarcely suppressed snicker from Bunk Hopgood. Mrs. Brown had not been dead much over a year.

I stood dismayed, not knowing what to say to a man so little the lover, so aggressively and openly the prospective husband of any girl who would have him.

At this moment the music began. The Honourable Augustus hurried off to claim his partner, and I saw Charlie Archibald coming for me. Then suddenly a silence like the breath of life from some far-off jungle fell upon the men about me. And in it I heard Tom Redding growl:

"Look at that fellow! What's he doing here?"

"Don't know," answered Peters in a rumbling whisper. "Didn't know the Buckhaulters knew him, didn't know anybody knew him!"

I followed the direction of their gaze and beheld a man standing just inside the doorway. He

would have seemed a foreigner in any land. In this gay and light company he was as far removed as if he had been Cuth-Ullin standing beside Tara's walls watching the ships of his enemy, Swaren, approach the rocky shores of ancient Ulster. Never had I seen a fiercer face, one so expressive of mad tenderness. He was not tall, with shoulders so wide that they made him appear of a lower statue than he really was. His black hair fell gently upon his brow, like a kindness. His brow was rugged as if his Sinai showed through at that place. And yet the whole Song of Solomon could have been written upon that fine, sensuous mouth. His eyes were deep set, very large, and, although they were lifted, farseeing above the crowd, I knew that they were black as pitch. The dark flush upon the high cheekbones gave way into smoky blue pallor of his square, clean-shaven chin. In a dress suit, he too appeared disguised, not himself, as if some ancient Druid priest had discarded his ragged skins to come among us.

All this I saw and felt in one fleeting glance, and have remembered every hour of my life since.

The next moment fifty couples swung out upon the floor.

The evening's diversion took its permanent form. It became the light opera of polite society.

Around and around we circled, crossed and circled again. I saw father sitting like an old eagle with folded wings beside the Buckhaulters, following me with his slowly turning head, with his steady eyes fixed upon me like watchmen. And I changed from one partner to another like one who dances in a dream with shadows. They were not real, they had no meaning to me, these men who led me, now whirling swiftly, now slowly through the mazes of the dance. The only man in the room was the stranger, I was alone with him, divided from all others by that silent presence. Ever and anon we lilted past him, sometimes standing beside the wall with his hands behind him, nonchalantly observant of all, but not of me. Or, he would turn from us all to the vase of long-stemmed roses beside him, as if they were sisters of his whom he tenderly cherished. Never once was I conscious of his eyes fixed upon me. It became a furious anger, this oblivion into which he cast me, who knew myself to be in the eye of every other man in the room, even in that of Emmet, who was openly neglecting Margaret Derry, leaving her for Francis to squire.

I longed to ask some one who this stranger was. Why had he been bidden to my ball, and then not presented to me? What did it mean? He

ought to be very much embarrassed, I thought. But I had never seen a man less embarrassed, better contented to be ignored. Still I could not bring myself to ask the question, to admit that I had ever seen him. I carefully pretended not to see him.

Meanwhile, on every hand I heard the question whispered that I dared not ask. I saw the faces of other women, lifted like little glowing lanterns over the shoulders of their partners staring at him, their brows raised inquisitively, their eyes wide and curious. Once I was sitting out a dance with Chan Peters; Margaret Derry, and Alice Archibald, seated together a little distance farther down the room, were discussing him.

"Who on earth is that man over there?" Alice began.

"I don't know, never saw him before. Looks like a bandit," answered Margaret.

"A bandit! ha, ha! Oh, ha, ha, ha!" tinkled Alice, "that's it exactly. He does look like one."

"I wish he'd do something to prove it," Margaret went on. "We haven't had a sensation in Millidge society since ——" she hesitated.

"Since I ran away and married Charlie Archibald! Say it! You'd as well say it, as to think it," laughed Alice.

"Well, since that, then. Suppose he were to

drop the rose he's fingering as if it were his lady love's hand, face about, put his back to the wall, draw two terrible guns, click the triggers and yell, 'Your money, your jewels, or your lives!'— what would happen?"

"There'd be a lot of window glass broken, and presently nobody here but us," answered Alice.

"You mean the women?"

"Yes; nothing could make women fly from a man who looks like that!"

"You are awful, Alice!"

"I am not awful. I'm just truthful. That little Milly Bean over there, who is so timid she scarcely speaks above a whisper, would be the first to cast herself sobbing upon his breast," she insisted.

"Still, I do not think all the men would run," protested Margaret.

"Of course not, I was joking about that. What I meant was that none of the women would. They'd stay and rob him!"

"Oh, Alice!"

"It's true. Women never fear men when they are wearing their evening gowns. Least of all the terrible man. They are always armed to the teeth when their shoulders are bare!"

That from Alice, the girl-wife! A good wife, one of those past participles of virginity who has

lived with a man thirty years, never learns this much about the nature of him.

I listened to this conversation while I carried on a kind of first-year flirtation with Chan. I was encouraging him with that gentle discouragement which is the initial step in coquetry. My attention was frightfully divided. The wings of my heart were beating against the stranger, my ears were directed toward Alice and Margaret. But Chan, looking only into my face, missed nothing.

"I believe in love at first sight," he was saying when Emmet Marshall came up to claim the next dance.

"So do I, Peters, every fellow here to-night does! But you should not speak so loud about it. Sotto voce for that, my boy," laughed Marshall, looking back at the embarrassed youth as he drew me into the dance.

The last strains of the waltz died away in the tumultuous sound of many notes, like the feet of fairies hurrying before the dawn. The Buckhaulters arose and led the way to the dining-room, followed by the broken ranks of the dancers. Emmet and I had places at the long table in the middle of the room, with father and our hosts at one end, with a row of guests seated on either side between. The rest of the company found

places at smaller tables in the library that adjoined, and the door of which was open.

Hanging very low upon the wall opposite me was one of those little old-fashioned mirrors, a narrow panel with a hunting scene painted above the glass.

"This is fine. We are completely screened by that bunch of chrysanthemums. We are alone in a flower garden. I have a favour to ask. Couldn't ask it in the open," said my companion, leaning toward me and whispering.

"What is it?" I asked.

"May I call you Joy? It's the most becoming name for a woman I ever heard. I have been saying it over and over to myself all the evening."

I hesitated and was lost.

"Joy it is!" he exclaimed, then: "Wait a minute till Mrs. Buckhaulter takes her goggles off us. She's spying around the chrysanthemums. I have something to tell you."

But that lady was not the one to withdraw her gaze until she made up her mind about whatever she was looking at.

"Old cat!" he grumbled. "She'll have everybody staring at us in another minute. Thinks we are not hitting it off together. Try to look pleasant. Cut your eye at me. I'm doing my best, but it doesn't count unless you play up!"

I bent my head and laughed involuntarily at the situation.

"Way's clear. Inspection's over. That giggle did it. She's satisfied. Now look at me, I can't tell you this while you are dabbling your face in your plate!"

"I'm not dabbling my face in my plate," I retorted, looking at him.

"Listen, You are changed! You are no longer Anne of Gierstien! You never will be again! You are a witch! You ought to be ducked now before you go too far! You may be burned later if you keep on the way you have started!"

He covered me with eyes half humorous, half impassioned.

I opened my lips to speak, not knowing what I should say, I felt the corners of them rising as if Cupid was my property man, arranging a smile.

"Stop!" he exclaimed, "don't say anything. You'll break something if you do. And don't look at me like that! I can't stand it!"

"Stop yourself! I do not know what you mean," I protested.

"Nor what you mean," he added quickly. "Heaven help us all when you find it out!"

He stood up and lifted his glass.

"Here's to Mistress Joy Marr! May she remain what she is, Joy, and never change!"

Twenty glasses tinkled merrily, twenty heads nodded smiles to me.

But I saw only one. Reflected in the mirror upon the opposite wall I beheld the stranger standing in the darkest corner of the library alone behind a little table, with his glass lifted, with his eyes fixed in a burning gaze upon mine. He drank the toast deliberately, bowed, and disappeared below the range of my vision.

"My stars! Joy, what is it? You look as if Life had kissed you in the face!" exclaimed Emmet Marshall as he resumed his seat and stared at me.

I could not speak. I was filled with such emotion as I never dreamed of. I felt like a coal of fire suddenly laid upon an altar and sanctified. My face burned.

Being vain as only a man can be before the blossoming face of a maid, he considered himself the author of this miracle, this flush which left my eyes full of tears and my heart beating like the drums of Love.

I understood that he was deceived, and I left him to his vanity. I had not given up the idea of the rich husband. But I had located the stranger. He was no longer a foreigner. He was the native of that far country, my heart, treading the primrose paths, drinking from the

very springs of my life. Even in that supreme moment I wondered what I was going to do about it. I ached at the thought of his banishment. I resolved not to do it when I had the chance, and in the same moment I looked as bewitchingly as I could at Emmet.

CHAPTER THREE

I AWAKENED late the morning after the ball. Breakfast was over, father and Francis were gone. The house was silent but for the faint tinkling of silver and the rattling of china as Molly cleared the table in the dining-room. I arose and went leisurely about my bath and toilet, confused with the memories of the night before, questioning the day, after the manner of a girl who has her hand stretched out to love.

Presently the door opened a few inches and the white-turbaned head of Molly appeared.

"Miss Joy, the 'phone's been ringin' all the mornin'. Your pa said for me not to call you, but Miss Alice is at it again. She says can you come. She's got something particular to tell you!"

"Tell her I'll be there in a minute. And, Molly, don't hang up the receiver!" I called to her as she closed the door.

She was our only servant, maid, and counsellor. Two years previous to this time, after many trials in the house and kitchen, father put this

notice in the Want Column of the Millidge *Gazette*:

WANTED — A destitute and unfortunate woman, with no ties, to do general housework in a small but exacting family. Must have a cheerful disposition and a good character. Coloured preferred. Room on the place.

Molly not only answered this extraordinary advertisement, but she exactly filled the description, and ever since she had filled the demands. She was gifted with a sentimental nature, and therefore knew herself to be unfortunate. She was undoubtedly destitute and remained so. We took her upon her own recommendation — that she did not have a "character." This turned out to be an exaggeration. She had a character, but no morals except the moral of faithfulness. And she had a disposition which smiled, morning, noon, and night upon the inky blackness of her countenance. The only bad habit she had was that she invariably hung up the receiver when she came to say some one wanted to speak to one of us over the 'phone. There was no way to convince her that this made any difference. She refused to understand the perversities of electrical currents.

I hurriedly stuck the remaining pins in my hair and ran into the library.

"Hello, Alice!" I called, with the receiver cupped to my ear.

"Good morning, Joy! Are you up at last? I've called twice already."

"Yes, I am, but don't pretend that you are!" I retorted.

"No, not yet. I haven't as much to get up for. Only a husband, and he's gone to town long ago. But you have all the young men in Millidge to get up for and consider before your mirror. Tell me, how does it feel to be a belle?"

"Oh! Alice, I almost hate this day. It's so pale, so colourless, no music, no flowers. But I suppose any kind of a day would be an anti-climax to such an evening," I complained.

"You ungrateful little wretch! But you have not answered my question."

"I'm not sure how it feels to be a belle. I dare not believe that. But I do know how a firefly must feel the next morning after skimming about like a little lantern with a hundred other little lanterns in a particularly beautiful flower-scented night!"

"I wonder if those gorgeous insects ever are foolish enough to elope and get married — to — to humble bees?" she asked.

"Of course not. Humble bees are made for

other humble bees, and they don't go a courting out of their own class in the dark — the ——"

"That's it," she interrupted. "Moral, never marry an humble bee, if you are a firefly! Last night, Joy, I almost regretted what I'd lost by that ridiculous elopement. When I saw all of you girls having such a good time, so free to choose and choose and choose!"

"Well, even when we do our best, we may not choose as wisely as you have done, dear. Mr. Archibald was nearly the handsomest man in the room last night."

"Nearly, but not quite. That is exactly what I thought myself. I thought it every time I looked at the one who was. It made me almost angry. And that's one thing I called you to tell. I know you are crazy to find out who he is."

"Who who is?" I parried.

"Now, don't pretend that you do not know the one I mean. I'll venture you dreamed about him last night."

"I did not dream at all last night, I was too tired. And I haven't the least idea what you mean," I insisted.

"That's a fib, and it just shows how deeply you are interested in him already. Women always do that: put their hand over the name of

the man they are really thinking about when anybody comes along."

"Still, I do not know whom you mean," I declared.

"Why, the brigand, the bandit at the ball last evening."

"I didn't see any such person," I declared, feeling the blood rise in my cheeks.

"That terrible man who had the figure of a burly bodied outlaw, the face of an ugly saint, with the light streaming from his eyes like torches in a cavern blown by the wind."

"I didn't see his eyes," I blundered.

"There! I knew you'd seen him. No one could help it. He was the exclamation point that made interrogation points of every woman in the room."

"Now, that you recall him, I do remember a stranger who was not presented to me," I confessed.

"Oh, that was the place where the Buckhaulters drew the line. They had to ask him, for private reasons. But they were not obliged to introduce him to their friends."

"Still it was queer, not to introduce him," I insisted.

"Not queer, merely impudent. But he had the best of it. The difference between being a wallflower and an indifferent celebrity upon such

an occasion is accomplished by turning your back to the company. Wallflowers sit or stand face forward, confessing defeat. He turned his back on us and put us out of countenance. He——"

"But who is he?" I interrupted.

"I asked Charlie. It seems that all the men know him. His name is David Brock. There you have it!" she laughed.

David Brock! I felt it sink and shine in a text of green and gold above the door of my heart I became in that moment a little shrine far out upon a dusty road, ages old, earth stained, lichen marked, waiting patiently for the knees of one pilgrim to bow before me.

"Is he — is he married?" I inquired like the mortal virgin I was.

"No!" tinkled Alice, laughing shrilly. "Worse than that: he's a promoter. Never do to marry him. Might have to beg your bread later. He's bought West Meadow, the Buckhaulters' country place on the edge of town."

"What's he going to do with it?" I asked.

"Doing already! He's cutting it up into lots, laying it out into squares, putting down pavements, going to make it the fashionable suburb of Millidge, if he doesn't break before he can do it. The place is beautiful, you know, covered with forest trees. He's already sold

every third lot at an auction last week, they say. The Leighs have bought out there and the Gillfillings — a number of people we know, but on time, with only small payments. Charlie says if Brock can hold it long enough, he'll be the richest man in Millidge. Now you know why the Buckhaulters asked him: Prospective millionaire. And why they didn't introduce him: Not certain whether he'll turn out to be a millionaire or an adventurer!"

I sat with the receiver still cupped to my ear, but silent. There is a promoter in every woman, besides a shrine. I was somewhere between the two places in my reflections.

"But that isn't what I really called you for, dear," she went on. "Emmet wants you and Charlie and me to dine with him at the Country Club this evening. He said he didn't dare call so early himself, and he knew you'd be overwhelmed with invitations. He and Charlie are going out early in the afternoon to play golf. I am to come by for you in my electric. Emmet will bring you home in his car. Now, don't say you have an engagement. I'm so anxious to have a finger in your pie. And Emmet is so interesting. Don't you think so?"

"I do not know whether he is or not," I answered dryly. "I'll be glad to go, only I've

promised to receive with Shirley Leigh this afternoon, and I ought to go down to see Mrs. Buckhaulter."

"You can see her any time. She's fussed up to-day straightening out the house. She won't want you. Put that off till to-morrow. I'll be at the Leighs' myself this afternoon. We'll go from there to the club."

So it was arranged, and at seven o'clock we were seated around a table in the loggia of the club, at the end of a long row of other tables, the stars in the clear country sky shining through the windows like cold, distant eyes, the casements below a mass of azaleas, lilies, and poinsettias. Alice looked like an anemone in her blue gown with her white furs slipped back from her shoulders. I wore darker blue, with a bunch of Richmond roses in my belt. We were waiting for the men. Alice fixed her eyes upon my roses.

"Who sent them?" she asked.

"Emmet," I replied.

"Well, he has sense about flowers for women. They bring out the opal mystery of your presence. They prove that your eyes are blue, not gray. If I wore them, they would fade me. Oh!" she sighed, leaning back. "I am surfeited with the Leighs' salads and ices. Isn't it awful how much we have to eat?"

"I haven't found it so, yet," I replied, laughing.

"You will. One day last week I attended six functions where eating was the chief diversion. Charlie had some friends out here to breakfast at eleven o'clock. We went in town to luncheon at the Gilfillings, and you know what that means. Those people spend half their substance on their table. In the afternoon I went to Mrs. Franklin's reception. She served eggnog and fruit cake. At seven we dined with the Leighs and went to see 'The Devil,' that horrid play at the Casino. And afterward we all had Welsh rarebit and beer at the Terrace. And that's the way it goes day after day, night after night. Naturally we look like turtles around the waist by the time we are forty. The wonder is that we don't before we are thirty."

At this moment Archibald and Emmet entered and hurried to their places beside us.

"Sorry to be late," Charlie apologized, "had a meeting of the governors, couldn't get out."

Emmet offered his hand to me, smiled, unfolded his napkin across his knee and addressed Alice.

"Well, little scavenger, what's the news of the day?"

"Charlie, protect me! This man has called me something!"

"Can't do it, Alice, you are worse than the

sparrows, always mongering in the dust of the street," answered Archibald.

She was the kind of woman who could win the most ardent affection from a man without commanding his respect, not even the respect of her husband.

"Very well, then, I'll deserve my reputation and tell you the latest," she cried. "Mrs. Franklin has taken a companion!"

"This is scandalous! what do you mean?" demanded Emmet.

"She appeared with her this afternoon at the Leighs'; it's a woman of course; couldn't be anything else, you know; said she felt so unprotected socially without a chaperon."

We laughed.

Mrs. Franklin was a widow, the richest woman in Millidge, past fifty. She wore an elaborately curled auburn wig, thick black paste where her brows had been, rouged outrageously, painted her withered lips with glistening French rouge. She had been beautiful and kept up the illusion in her own mind in this manner. She looked like an old, bent, poisonous mushroom, and was one of the caricatures of society in the town. She was still determined to marry. And resorted to any subterfuge by which to intimate and at the same time protect her charms. The companion

was the latest, an unheard of being until now in Millidge.

"I'm disappointed in you, Alice," said Emmet reproachfully. "Old lady's just coming to her senses. Always thought she needed a keeper."

"Well, you'll see. She'll get one yet. And it will not be a woman with her hair skinned back from her face, wearing a shirtwaist and skirt, like this companion she's got now!" insisted Alice.

The farther you go in society, the worse it gets. I had already gone too far. I did not know the language of the company I was in. But as I sat there telepathic, anxious to learn, I discovered a new plane of thought in myself. The carrion level of this life, I stepped into it, without a scruple, like the adventuress I was. I resolved to make good in it. That is the foreword of all adventurers, to ascend whatever height or descend into whatever depths that face them with a nerve which knows neither modesty nor mercy. It is a kind of electrical current that supplies inspiration for the proper accomplishment of the performance in word or deed.

"And now what do you know? Or are you still too nice to know anything?" inquired Emmet, turning a quizzical, smiling face to me.

"A little," I replied, taking my cue, feeling that

singular venom which is the blood of conversation among men and women in this circle.

"Let's have it!" said Archibald, looking at me queerly, anxiously, as one stares at a tight-rope dancer above an abyss.

"We are also glad to know that Margaret Derry has got her hat back from the cemetery," I announced with mock gravity.

"From the cemetery! What do you mean, Joy? It's the last place I'd ever look for a milliner, though now I think of it, there'd be wonderful choice in trimmings," Alice laughed.

"You know Mrs. Walters was buried to-day. Well, it seems that Margaret went to stay with poor old Madam Walters, who was ill and couldn't come downstairs even for the funeral. Margaret wore the wonderful hat covered with orchids that she brought back with her from Paris. The house was in confusion, of course — no one to receive her at the door; so when she came in, she unpinned it and laid it on the piano downstairs. The undertakers, mistaking it for a floral offering, placed it upon the casket, where they say it was much admired. But at the cemetery, when they were taking the flowers out of the van to lay upon the grave, old Mrs. Franklin recognized Margaret's hat as it was being placed with the others, and she said so, out loud enough for everybody to

hear. Then she skipped up and snatched it off, from under the very eyes of the bereaved young husband. It was she who brought it back to Mrs. Derry."

Alice lay back in her chair and laughed merrily.

"Oh, that is too good, Joy!" she cried. "What did Margaret say?"

"I don't know what she said, but it was what Mrs. Franklin said that was so funny. She found Margaret running about in the lower rooms of the Walters' house looking distractedly for her hat. 'I knew, dear, that it was a mistake, that you wouldn't go as far as that at such a time!' she said, handing it to her. Nobody knows whether the old thing meant it, or if she just didn't realize how it sounded?"

"Oh, she meant it," asserted Alice, "and served Margaret right. She's never been intimate enough with the family to be comforting John Walters' mother at such a time. Vicarious way she had of offering sympathy to John, first step she was making into his widowerhood! Now she'll be obliged to clear out. Can't go on after as obvious a thing as that happened!"

"Come, Alice, you are going too far," continued Archibald, looking at Emmet's face, the colour of which had changed and deepened into that flush

which in the male countenance is the weather signal of anger.

"But not so far as Margaret went herself. Everybody knows she'd marry Walters or any other man with enough money," persisted his wife.

There is such a thing as being too successful in viciousness, which is nearly as bad as being too effective in goodness. It is the way to fail in both. I felt myself trembling upon the edge of some such disaster as the former. I cast a surreptitious glance at Emmet's lowering visage. Still he could not defend Margaret. I have observed this about men: they will take up cudgels in defense of any other man, however undeserving, but if the victim is a woman, and if they are in the company of other women, they never do. The bravest of them are not brave enough for that.

We were silent a moment, covering the ugly pause by observing the stream of guests who were now coming in rapidly and filling the places at the other tables. Presently I felt Emmet's eyes upon me. His face had cooled. He wore the expression of a man who had readjusted his point of view in a certain matter. He looked at me challengingly, impudently, as much as to say he understood, admired my nerve — and me, a trifle less.

He bent toward me and in the general confusion murmured:

"Take care, Mistress Joy; he who lives by the sword must perish by the sword!"

"Not always," I retorted. "Many survive the conflict and die in times of piping peace."

"Not in this kind of warfare. Peace doesn't pipe ever for such adversaries. Scene of battle changes, that's all. Look at Alice Archibald"—he lowered his voice to escape the attention of Charlie and his wife, who were bowing to some acquaintances—"she's still at it, post marital field, no quarter, using her tongue all day long every day like a rapier."

"Don't tell me Alice will ever fall by the sword," I laughed.

"She will, unless she's court-martialed by her own set first, which is worse!"

"But what is one to do between firing lines?" I returned.

"Better get out of it. Better marry and settle down," he answered sagely.

"Alice is married," I returned.

"But she has not settled down," he came back quickly. "Her gauntlet is still in the ring."

"I do not know what you mean."

"Look at her now and you will see," he replied.

We both regarded her. She hung above the

table like a little blue and gold pendant, hard, glistening, bent slightly forward with her brilliant gaze fixed upon some one at another table. Her lips parted, the colour deepening in her cheeks. Never have I beheld an expression so keenly acquisitive, so delicately passionate.

Instinctively I turned my head to see the object of her attention, and met the eyes of David Brock, seated with Mr. Leigh, not ten feet away — black, expressionless in his dark face. I felt my own redden as I looked back at Emmet. He was smiling sardonically both at Alice and me. The tables were turned, and I knew that somewhere far within Emmet knew that they were turned, that this was his rapier retort for the one we had given him about Margaret and Walters.

It is astonishing how much faster the eye receives and the heart feels than the lips can speak. All this happened in one instant of time. The next, Alice had drawn herself back into the rôle she played with us, including her husband.

"What are you two whispering about? It is not proper in a room full of people!" she exclaimed gayly and in a voice which carried to the next table.

"I was just telling Miss Marr that you will be court-martialed some day," Emmet answered daringly.

"And for what crime, please? That is something you do to people who have committed high treason, isn't it?"

"Yes, or low treason, or for not carrying out orders. Same penalty."

"And will you sit on the case, Emmet?" she demanded with narrowing eyes.

"No, I'll be excused for cause!" he retorted meaningly.

Archibald, who had turned around in his chair and was speaking to Mr. Leigh, now arose and went over to shake hands cordially with David Brock.

"He was elected a member of the club this afternoon," he explained as he resumed his chair.

"Did you vote for him, Emmet?" Alice asked.

"Oh, yes. Nice fellow, I reckon. Besides, we may all be wanting to borrow money of him, or asking him to go bond for us if his deal goes through," he laughed.

"And if it doesn't?" I put in.

Emmet looked at me quietly as one refers again to a letter already read, to confirm its contents. He knew me then better than I knew myself. For I only knew what I wanted. He understood that in the terms of my character softly forming.

"In that case, he'll probably want to borrow of us," answered Archibald.

"And you will lend?" I went on with pretended indifference.

"Not on the security he is likely to offer, and not without security. We are more apt to post him here for not paying his dues!" Emmet replied.

"He doesn't look like a man who would ask favours," commented Alice, mincing at her salad.

"Can't tell what a man will ask from looking at him, nor what a woman wants from looking at her," Emmet retorted.

"Still, I don't think he'd wait to be posted," I defended.

"Maybe not. Maybe he'll furl his tent like the Arab and steal quietly away in the night."

"I must say you talk very doubtfully of a man whom you have just received!" said Alice.

"Oh, he's all right if he doesn't fail. But the chances are against him. Buckhaulter put his name up. Thinks he'll make it."

There was a movement at the other table. The next moment Leigh, a round-bodied little man with a red face and a military moustache, came over.

"Mrs. Archibald, I want to present Mr. David Brock, Miss Marr, Mr. Brock. You know Marshall and Archibald, I believe."

We bowed, Charlie and Emmet stood up, and Alice began:

"Oh! Mr. Brock, we've been hearing about you! And Joy — all the girls are crazy to meet you, aren't you, Joy?" she laughed, turning to me.

"I am very glad to know you, Mr. Brock," I replied, struggling desperately to show becoming nonchalance.

"You are most fortunate to have come to Millidge at this time, my boy," said Leigh, laying his hand upon the broad shoulders of his guest. "Miss Marr has just made her début."

"Or unfortunate!" he answered, bowing gravely to me.

It is thus that we accomplish the wonderful in society, as if it were the commonplace — as if it were a part of the order of things, as indeed it is. But as I sat there with this man standing before me, with my heart beating so quickly that the lace upon the bosom of my gown rippled like the feathers in a bird's wings, I could have wept that I had met him, spoken to him first in a crowded room. I felt that it was a thing which should have happened on a starry night, that he should have worn a green chaplet upon his head, that I should have had lilies in my hair, and there should have been no witnesses on an occasion so pregnant with fate. So are girls made until something changes them. And even afterward

they retain the faint presence of this earlier self. They all have beneath the curls beside their faces the little pointed ears of a fawn, invisible, but there. And they were by nature the mates of Pan long before they became the primmer maiden of men.

CHAPTER FOUR

THREE blocks beyond our house, Forest Avenue opens into Forest Park. On the other side there is a short street called Camden Place, and in those days it was the fashionable postscript to the avenue where the younger married couples of society settled themselves, among others, the Archibalds. Their residence was an enlarged doll's house, built in the pretty frivolous Japanese style with parasol pagodas at each end of the porch.

Late one December afternoon I went to have a cup of tea with Alice. I was not so tired with the useless diversions of a débutante as I was depressed by a nameless disappointment. During the week that had passed since our introduction at the Country Club, I had seen David Brock only once. He was in a car with four other men speeding down the avenue. He either did not or would not see me walking along the pavement on the opposite side. It was a thing I did not know then, but came to understand later, that a man never notices a woman, especially if she is *the* woman, when he is concerned with business affairs. She

amounts to an immorality at such a time, to a dangerous intoxication which may interfere with the proper sharpening of his faculties. David was taking three old boar capitalists of Millidge out to West Meadow, who were prospective purchasers of lots. Therefore, I did not exist.

Alice professed to be ailing. At such times she took occasion to look particularly bewitching in *négligé*. This afternoon I found her reclining upon a lounge before the fire in her infinitesimal parlour, which she had contrived to make as bright and foolish as a booth at a society bazaar. The walls were covered with Japanese prints. And she looked like one herself in her pale blue kimono embroidered with sprays of cherry blossoms. She had tiny fans stuck in her hair. She was the first woman in Millidge to adopt this geisha girl fashion. She had an instinct which led her straight to the demi-monde method of adornment. It is the instinct of advanced fashion in women's clothes everywhere.

We passed the hour in the usual gossip; she propped among her brilliant, soft cushions; I seated beside her holding one of the fragile cups and saucers in my hand, sipping jasmine tea.

"Do you know where I got it?" she asked, smiling. "A present from David Brock! You

can't buy it at all in this country, he says. Some friends sent it to him from Yokohama."

"Oh!" I said, looking down at the pale amber liquid in my cup.

"Nice of him, wasn't it?"

"Yes," I admitted, wondering how she had got as far as this with him in so short a time.

"Have you seen him since the other night?" she inquired.

"No," I answered, "but you must have!"

"Yes, I made Charlie ask him here to dinner on Tuesday. He didn't want to do it, but I told him he owed the courtesy after taking him in the club, you know. He's very pleasant. Not nearly so much of a boor as he looks. He was so pleased too with the house. Said a lady surrounded with so much oriental colouring ought to have tea to match. Said this was the kind the Samurai drink in Japan. The next day a messenger brought it, in the prettiest little pewter caddy. There it is, on top of the cabinet."

She waved her hand and I saw a pewter jar, covered with strange script, standing beside an ugly vase with a white dragon on it. I looked at it with emotion, not indignant, but deeper than indignation, more intelligent. For the first time I saw Alice's horoscope, read it dimly in the enigmatical symbols on the squatty pewter jar.

And I knew that I did not like her, never had liked her.

"I must hurry!" I said, rising, setting down my cup, and drawing my furs over my shoulders.

"Going somewhere?" she asked.

"Yes, with Emmet, to the play. It's late, and I have to dress."

"And it's raining!" she exclaimed, propping herself up on one elbow and looking out of the window.

"No, sleeting," I corrected, pointing to the glass against which hundreds of glistening beads were tinkling.

"Have a good time!" she admonished.

"I always do with Emmet," I retorted by way of laying a concealing hand over my furious heart.

"Still, you never can tell. Always is often a short time with Emmet Marshall, they say. Make hay while the sun shines, Joy," she laughed.

"You mean while the sleet falls," I replied, thrusting one hand into my muff and opening the door.

"May afford a better opportunity than sunshine, I imagine, for your harvesting, my dear," I heard her say as I closed the door.

I hurried across the park, which is a deserted place in winter. It stretched before me ghostly

gray in the fading light, the fountains fringed with icicles, the trees bending in the gale, the sleet filling the air and stinging my face. I reached the bridge which swung in a white arch above a narrow neck of the lake that lay in the middle of the park like a broken slate between its curved irregular banks. Suddenly the electric light came on and hung above my head, a long necklace of steady round opals in the immense darkness. The wind wove and broke swiftly webbed shadows of the naked branches of the trees above upon the ground. It filled all the place like an angry presence. I was the only other — the one human in that frigid expanse of shivering nature. The woman does not live who is not afraid to be alone in the open, not even upon the brightest day. She can never make a companion of the sun, least of all alone with the stars. They remind her of her incompleteness, of her helplessness. She lacks that great companion courage which is, after all, of the masculine gender. She becomes a prey of her terrors. She is held up, almost robbed, by her own imagination.

I stood dismayed by the sound of my own footsteps upon the bridge; then gathering the folds of my long coat closer with one hand, and pressing my muff to my breast with the other, I started running as if pursued by furies. The same instant

another leaping, long-striding shadow fell beside mine upon the path, a shadow so wide, so bent in the gale that it might have been the black spirit of the earth risen from the frozen lake.

I gasped. The lights fell crashing about me, the trees leaped from their roots and fled, a gigantic column before the blast, I was borne along in it, encircled by the arms of it, and softly gently deposited somewhere.

For one moment I must have lost consciousness. Then I realized that I was seated upon the rustic bench at the end of the bridge, still clasped in the arms of the gale. I felt a warm rough hand upon my face, and, opening my eyes, beheld David Brock looking down at me as a shepherd might look at a lamb clasped in his bosom in a storm. His face was as white as my own must have been; his brows drawn so close together they made a straight line above his eyes, intensely black, yet with the red glow of fire in their depths.

"Not a brigand, dear lady, only a humble squire who was hastening to attend you through the forest!" he murmured eagerly with his lips close to my ear, as if he were not sure I had recovered sufficiently to understand.

"Oh, how you frightened me!" I whispered, attempting to sit straight.

"Not I! you were frightened before you saw my shadow. Admit it."

"I think — perhaps — I was. That only confirmed my fears!"

I began to tremble and sob uncontrollably. He gently pressed my face down into the folds of his great coat with his hand.

"I was taking the shortest way back to town from my office at West Meadow," he explained, "when I saw you flying along before me here in the park, and I hurried to overtake you. Forgive me!"

"But this is worse than that, isn't it?" I laughed so close that I felt his heart beating like a muffled drum.

I made a determined effort, released myself, and sat up, straightening the little close-fitting turban on my head.

We stared at each other and laughed together. It was a confession, that laugh. It was the light chorus of love that burst involuntarily from our lips — his, deep and resonant, as if Cupid had suddenly become a man with a bugle bass voice; mine, a wavering treble, as if Cupid had suddenly become a maid.

As quickly as the sound came, it died upon our lips. We turned each from the other. He lifted the hand he had held over my face, still wet with

my tears. He looked at it, then kissed it reverently as a pilgrim knight might have kissed the feet of the Virgin.

I do not know how long we sat thus silent side by side. It was as if we had accomplished a calm in the midst of a great uproar. The storm raged, the branches of the trees cracked, split and fell like warriors upon a terrible and ghostly field. But we neither saw nor felt this fury of nature. There are blessed moments when Time is not, when Eternity lifts the web of the years and we pass through into the profound stillness — when for the space of a breath we live forever.

This, I say, was the miracle we achieved, two transient creatures, made of dust, born to die; with our hands clasped we ascended out of the hurricane into the soft rhythm of the hidden stars.

To be loved is to be baptized. A dove descends upon your head. I felt the dove. I came to myself, conscious only of that, of having been redeemed by this warm beating of wings in my heart.

Yet was I the serpent still? This is a matter not recorded in Genesis, the one thing which Eve was able to conceal from the great historian of that period — that the serpent entered her bosom that fatal day before she returned to Adam. He

still remains there, forever charming the dove which is also there, ever drawn toward the forked tongue of evil.

"You know, you understand, don't you?" said David with tender gravity as he attempted to draw me to him.

"I know that it is snowing hard," I exclaimed, springing to my feet. I looked about me at the shrouded ground. The lake had disappeared. The wind was gone. Every bough of the trees stretched blacker beneath the line of snow upon it.

"When did it begin?" I asked astonished.

"I do not remember," he answered, smiling as he stood up; "a long time ago, about a thousand happy years ago!"

"Don't tell me we have been here ten minutes!" I cried, "for I had not ten minutes to lose!"

I was thinking that I should be late now for my engagement with Emmet.

David took out his watch and looked at it.

"It is now six o'clock, but I do not know of what day," he added whimsically. "I had the feeling that you and I had been living together all our lives."

"Well, we haven't!" I laughed as we hurried out into the avenue, David striding beside me. After a pause, he said:

"A moment since, I thought I knew you, that we knew each other. That we were probably the only two people in the world who understood each other perfectly. Now in the flash of an eye, in the space of time it takes a snowflake to fall, we are become what we were before. I am only a poor unknown young man who happens to have the honour of escorting the belle of Millidge home. Queer, isn't it?"

"Not queer at all. Natural. We've just returned to the conventional and the commonplace where we belong," I answered.

"Who lifted the curtain? Who passed us into the sacred, uncommon place?"

I made no reply.

"You should not have been out so late alone," he began again presently.

"I had been with Alice, having some of that tea you sent her!" I flashed, now completely in possession of myself and my previous emotion, which I perceived was indignation, after all.

"She asked me for it," he answered a trifle too quickly, as if he also followed the thought in my mind. "I'll send you the other caddy. I have one left," he added.

"No, don't! I hate it, that tea! It smells like sweet poison. Good-night!" We had reached

my door. I sprang up the steps, leaving him staring up at me dismayed.

"But," he exclaimed, "I want to ——"

"Good-night, Mr. Brock!"

"Good-night, Miss Marr!"

I closed the door, and stood for a moment in the dim hall, looking about me, deeply wretched. What was it he was going to say? What was it he wanted? My life, my happiness depended upon knowing. Yet I had not permitted him to tell me. A woman will always exercise a peevish power over a man when she knows she can, even at the expense of her own peace of mind. That was the explanation, which I was too young to know of myself.

Francis was descending the stairs, elegantly attired, like a modern knight errant who carries a lady's glove in his breast pocket, not fastened in his helmet.

"Joy, it's seven o'clock! You've kept dinner waiting nearly an hour, and I have an engagement with Margaret Derry!"

"It is not seven o'clock!" I contradicted.

"Look at your watch," he answered, disappearing into the dining-room.

I looked. It was three minutes past seven!

Father came out of the library, walking very feebly, his carpet slippers flapping from his heels.

"Joy, you've kept dinner waiting over an hour," he complained.

I laid aside my coat and followed the two men in to dinner, still confused about the time, a lively suspicion taking shape in my mind about David.

Father seated himself dismally at the head of the table, bowed over it like an old warrior who has been borne in upon his shield. He took his soup as if in a certain case it would be the last nourishment he expected to swallow in this world of unjust and harassing debts.

Francis, at the other end, observed him sharply. We both recognized the premonitory symptoms which always went before a request for a loan. Seated between them, I used my spoon in a whisper, and kept my eyes lowered. It was a pregnant moment which I always dreaded. It lasted until the fowl was placed before father.

Then holding the carving knife aloft, suspended like a deadly weapon, he fixed a severe and accusing eye upon me.

"Joy, where's that hundred dollars I gave you last week?" he demanded.

"I spent it, father," I answered.

"You are becoming outrageously extravagant, Joy. How much do you owe? Come, tell me exactly."

"I do not know, father, a good deal, I fear."

"And my note falls due at the bank to-morrow!" he groaned.

As a matter of fact he had not given me a hundred dollars; my debts, which were many, remained blandly unpaid. But there are two relations women always sustain to weak and improvident men. Either they try to reform them and make up for their deficiencies with their own sacrifices, or they protect them. Mother spent her life in futile efforts to reform and atone for father's transgressions, and I have always pursued the other course of protecting him, which is the only effective method.

Usually during this prefatory dialogue, of which I was the invariable victim, Francis would draw and tighten his upper lip into a silent snarl, and pass his coldly brilliant eye from one to the other of us like an angry man caught in a trap. But that night I was astonished to observe a witty smile upon his thin face.

"Francis," father resumed with a sigh, "I am obliged to ask you to endorse my note at the bank again. And I must have the loan of another hundred, until next month. I shall be able then to return the entire amount."

"All right, father, but I cannot lend any more," he agreed.

"I have already explained to you, my son, that I shall not need any more. Should not have needed this if it had not been for Joy's outrageous extravagance. And I'm resolved to curb that. You understand, Joy, no more debts!"

His magnificent voice ran the scale of tones from aggrieved righteousness to Francis until it reached me severely authoritative, but contradicted by the beam of subdued wit in his eye.

Immediately he ascended into himself, squared his shoulders and proceeded to carve the fowl as if it were the form of vanquished fate upon the dish.

After dinner Francis took me aside and offered me a check.

"For your 'outrageous debts,'" he said, grinning.

I looked up at him in calculating amazement. I knew that the check was the price of something. He never parted with money generously.

"But, Francis, dear ——" I began.

"Going with Marshall to-night?" he interrupted.

"Yes," I answered.

"Think you could manage it again on Wednesday evening for the Franklin cotillion?"

"I don't know, he hasn't asked me," I answered, bewildered and embarrassed.

"Well, see that he does! I want to take Mrs. Derry!" he said shortly, turning upon his heels.

"So! that is it!" I cried laughing. "I'm to hold Emmet off while you pay court to Margaret."

"Exactly. Stand for your scandalous extravagance so long as you do!" he announced, pulling on his coat and gloves without looking at me.

Here was commerce for you, the trade of love reduced to its last analysis. I resolved to embrace the opportunity it afforded for a gown I needed for that same cotillion provided I secured the right partner, a matter which was giving me some concern, for I knew from Alice that Emmet intended to take Mrs. Derry.

We were seated in his box an hour later. The house was dark. The stage was a blaze of rosy light and crowded with a kind of variety ballet, varying from shepherdesses to girls in tights, with only short, gold-embroidered frills around their hips. Mrs. Buckhaulter nodded in the darkest shadow of our curtains. She made the best of chaperons: always lifting her fan and dozing behind it through an act, always lowering it, and searching the house with her opera glasses the moment the curtains fell, and the lights came on. Colonel Buckhaulter was even more satisfactory. He withdrew through each act of the performance,

only returning during the intermission to assist his wife in locating their friends and in receiving them. His chair was empty now. We were practically alone. The people in the orchestra circle below showed like a dim mass, ever in motion, but never moving more than their heads and shoulders. The music was flattering, the heels of the dancers, light, gay, sensuous. Feeling Emmet's eyes upon me, I was satisfied to watch them. A woman never appears so unconscious as when she is most conscious of the eyes of a man. I was supremely aware of myself. I wore a tunic of apple-green gauze over my white chiffon, gown, which was cut very low, like a green calyx upon the shoulders.

"Joy," whispered Emmet, "have you the least idea how you look?"

"No, not the faintest. I'm watching that pretty shepherdess yonder," I replied, with my eyes still upon the central figure on the stage.

"You look like a bending bough of apple blossoms, in the dark before the dawn. That circle of brilliants in your hair is the dew upon the blossom!"

"Thank you, Mr. Marshall! Do you make speeches like that to all the girls?" I smiled, looking over my shoulder at him.

"Not like that, no. It makes a fellow want to wear you for — a — for a gardenia!"

"And cast me away, withered like a gardenia, afterward!" I retorted not pleased.

"That would depend ——" he began.

"Upon whether he could get it," I finished hotly.

"No!" he retorted impudently.

The curtain fell. The crowded pit, boxes, and galleries sprang wildly applauding out of the darkness.

Mrs. Buckhaulter lowered her fan with a perceptible snort, and lifted her glasses.

"Marcellus, who is that ugly, dark person just entering Mrs. Franklin's box? Why, where is Marcellus?"

"Here, my dear, behind you," came the Colonel's voice.

"That blackamoor to whom you refer," said Emmet, "is the West Meadow Land Company, known to recent fame as Mr. David Brock."

It was in fact David standing behind Mrs. Franklin's chair, who leaned in it like an old poison mushroom, her flabby cheeks rouged, her red lips stretched in a ghastly smile, and a tiara of diamonds in her elaborately curled auburn coiffure sparkling like a wicked grin twined upside down.

"What does that mean?" demanded Mrs. Buckhaulter.

"Means that the old lady bought a whole block of West Meadow to-day, and paid cash for it!" laughed the Colonel.

"May mean that she intends to marry him!" added Emmet.

"Here, Marcellus, take these glasses and tell me who the other man is in there. I can't make him out."

"The Honourable Augustus Brown," said Emmet before the Colonel could adjust the lenses.

"He brought her — and the companion," I explained laughing. "I saw them enter late."

"Oh, then it is Brown she has her eye upon?" commented Mrs. Buckhaulter.

"Well, he seems to have his on the tiara, anyhow. Observe how he is staring at it!"

We all laughed.

"Has she invited you to her cotillion next week, Joy?" inquired Mrs. Buckhaulter.

"Oh, yes, Francis and I are both bidden. He is going with Margaret Derry," I replied. I saw my opportunity and seized it.

Under cover of a conversation between the Buckhaulters, Emmet turned to me.

"Did you say that your brother has an engage-

ment with Mrs. Derry for the cotillion?" he asked in a low voice.

"I think so. He has engagements with her for everything. Francis is very much in earnest this time I believe. You'd better look after your interests in that direction, Mr. Marshall!" I replied.

"I never compete!" he said, straightening himself and looking annoyed.

"No?"

"Never! it doesn't pay. By the way, will you go with me to the cotillion? Old Franklin has asked me to lead it."

"I'll be delighted," and I doubtless showed how delighted, for he smiled, evidently pleased with himself. I looked across and saw David apparently studying the frescoes in the ceiling above my head.

The week passed and I heard nothing from him. Then one afternoon Molly came to my door to say that some one wanted me over the 'phone. I hurried into the library, only to find that she had hung up the receiver.

"Molly!" I screamed, "you've disconnected!"

"No'm, I didn't, Miss Joy, He was right dar when I went to tell you. If he lef' he lef' hissef. I didn't do a thing to him!" she answered with her head through the kitchen door.

"Who was it, a man?"

"Yes'm, he was a man. I know that, but I don't know which one of 'em hit was, honey. You has so many callin' you."

"Was it Mr. Redding?"

"No'm, it warn't him. I know his voice."

"Was it Chan Peters or Bunk Hopgood?"

"No'm, Miss Joy, hit warn't none of them boys that comes round here so much, hit was a man, I tells you."

"Did he have a deep, low, rumbling voice, like — like soft thunder?"

"Lo, honey, no, he warn't mad, nor nothing like that. He spoke mighty pleasant, as if he had a bouquet in his mouth."

"Go away, Molly!" I exclaimed, "and don't hang up the receiver again; leave it swinging, throw it in the waste basket, anywhere.

She retired grumbling something about having been told when she used the 'phone not to leave the receiver hanging down.

I went back into the library, sat down by the telephone and stared at it disconsolately. I was sure it was David who had called. Every hour of every day since our meeting in the park I had been expecting him to call me.

Five minutes elapsed while I struggled with my disappointment. Then suddenly I snatched up

the telephone directory, turned the pages rapidly, frantically, as if it was a matter of life and death. I ran my eyes hastily down the B's until I came to the magic name and number.

"Give me Main, three double six!" I called. I waited with the receiver to my ear. Not a sound, not a click. I rattled the 'phone.

"Central! Quick! Main, three double six please! It's — oh! it's very important."

"Well," came a cold, steady voice. I was appalled. It was indeed the voice of David Brock, but, heavens! how harsh. I took my courage in my hands.

"Hello! is that you Mr. David Brock?"

"Yes, what do you want?"

"Oh!" I almost sobbed, the blood flying to my face.

"Hello! Hello!" the 'phone clattered furiously.

"Oh! Mr. Brock, did you, have you just called me?" I managed to say.

"Who is this speaking?" came the same harsh, measured tones.

"It's Joy Marr, Mr. Brock, and some one called, and the maid hung up the receiver before I could answer, and I thought perhaps it was you."

"Bless my soul! It was of course. But I didn't recognize your voice, I ——"

"Well, if that is the way you speak to people,

they'll never buy your lots, that's all!" I quavered, beginning to laugh. "You almost frightened me out of my wits!"

"Seems as if I were fated to do that, doesn't it? And it's the last thing in the world I'd want to do. I beg your pardon. I was busy here in the office, and I thought it was somebody wanting me uptown."

"But didn't you say you had just called me?"

"Er — yes — I did!"

"Well, here I am. What did you want?"

There was a perceptible pause, then:

"I wanted to ask you to go with me to Mrs. Franklin's cotillion."

"Oh, why didn't you ask sooner!" I cried, giving myself away.

"I did try, that night when you slammed the door in my face!" came reproachfully into my ear.

"I didn't, I ——"

At this moment Molly ushered Emmet into the room.

I clapped my hand over the 'phone and looked around appalled.

"Joy, I called, and couldn't get you. Central disconnected. Came anyhow, wanted to take you out to West Meadow; see how things are going out there. Haven't been, have you —— Hello! talking to somebody? Beg pardon!"

"Yes, to — to Alice!" I fibbed.

Then, distracted at the predicament, I put my lips to the 'phone again.

"Good-bye, dear, see you to-morrow!"

"Hello! hello! is that you Joy, darling — that was your voice!" I hung up the receiver.

"You two must have been saying something particularly bad and delicious to each other, judging by the warmth of your colour," said Emmet, laughing at my flushed face.

"We were. I don't know how I came to do it."

"You'll do a lot of things like that if you keep up your relations — only you won't keep them up!" he said. "Now bundle up. Cold as Greenland outside."

CHAPTER FIVE

THIS story is not designed to be an enlarged calendar of the social life of Millidge, and it will contain no account of scores of occasions through which I moved the gayest of the gay, the most flattered, the most popular girl in my set. A reference to the society pages of the Millidge *Gazette* of that year is enough to prove it. You will see from this record that there was not a function given in the university circles where the "beautiful and accomplished Miss Marr" did not appear, not a football game, not a marathon race upon the athletic field where she was not one of the spectators in a gayly decorated box, always accompanied by Chan Peters, Bunk Hopgood, or Tom Redding. These three were my younger squires who claimed the privilege of escorting me to their own affairs. They were also my most devoted lovers, losing no opportunity to declare their lasting affections. College boys have more of this kind than any other class of men in the world. They grow a new crop each year, according to grade they have attained, not in scholarship, but in experience. First-year

lovers are the most ardent! And there was no reception, nor luncheon, nor ball where I was not a conspicuous figure. You will even find descriptions of the costumes I wore. "Miss Marr was much admired in a white gown with a tunic of green chiffon fringed with gold beads," or, "Miss Marr wore white lace over coral silk, which enhanced her fresh young beauty," or, she wore "a simple and elegant coat suit of mole-coloured cloth at Miss Gillfilling's bridge party," or, she was "a charming hostess" at her own buffet luncheon "in a high-necked, white cloth gown with handsomely embroidered panels." The *Gazette* was the fashion delineator of Millidge society.

Poor Francis! he paid for all of mine without a murmur. Emmet Marshall, who was my constant, if not faithful, attendant throughout the season, represented the frank I had at the dressmaker's. Margaret Derry was to be seen everywhere with Francis, a slim, little, enigmatical person, who took what came her way and kept her own counsel about the future. Sometimes I felt her regarding Emmet and me with amused eyes, detached, aloof, like an impudent little providence who bided her time against the day of wrath and judgment.

All this, I say, is beside the mark, incidental to the real adventures which compose this narrative.

And even for these I claim no originality. They are familiar to every one who has observed a young and worldly browed woman looking for a rich husband. But my purpose is to portray these adventures from the inside. The heart is the property man in the drama of every life — a silent force which moves and accomplishes the scenes behind the curtain, out of sight. But in these pages the heart of Joy Marr will appear. You shall have the secret lines in the play which women say to themselves. You shall have the motives that lay back of common actions which give a different significance to them. You shall see the heart of me, that dim unclothed actor who cost Francis nothing and others so much, including myself — a mischievous playwright who took every advantage of customs, morals, and of the order of things to accomplish a private denouncement, to achieve the desired climax in the last act of an apparently ordinary drama of life.

There was good society in Millidge, the very best. The Buckhaulters, the Gillfillings, and the Leighs were the very backbone of it. They practised a rectitude which no mere saint could achieve in such surroundings. Saints lack that social experience, that tough moral elasticity, which would enable them to make proper distinctions in time to avoid overwhelming temptations.

They are the soil where virtues spring, thin, water-stemmed, and bloom as pale as if they grew only in the dark shadows of altars to a terrible God. But in Mrs. Buckhaulter, for example, virtues never went so far as to bloom at all. They were not of that fragile kind. She cultivated the evergreen principles of a hardy and enduring character. She was one of the windbreaks in the social world which often protected those less vigorous in honour and chastity.

You could not get past her with a questionable reputation, especially if you were a woman. Her parlours were the Dun and Bradstreet record of social standing in Millidge. She was always the first to open her doors to a young belle, and the first to close them upon any woman who crimped the edges of her popularity with doubtful manners.

But over and above the best society there is the foam of it, the lighter set, the straws in the great current. They must be, because the strength of the tide casts them up — the flotsam which becomes the jetsam in the darker eddies — not often wicked people, merely weak, useless, made self-indulgent by fortunes or circumstances, usually well off. This is why the girl who is in search of a rich husband, and of idle attention from men, invariably rises to that class. This fickle foam is the mesh full of young men who have fortunes

to be married, and who have leisure for the mere pastime of love making. The fact that they are masters of a certain inconsequential viciousness, a whimsical dishonour that seizes but does not utterly destroy, is not the worst of their attainments. Like all weak creatures, they have the self-protecting instinct developed to almost the mania of suspicion.

This was the difficulty I faced, flirting in the sunny foam of Millidge society. During that first year I acquired everything Emmet Marshall had to give but his hand and his fortune in marriage. I did not understand the nature of the breastwork he had thrown up between him and matrimony. I was not a philosopher. Philosophy is the liver pill of life. We do not take it ourselves until we are compelled to, however many bitter wisdom pellets of it we may roll for others. And we do not feel much better after we have swallowed the dose. We have simply mended our constitution, for enduring the vicissitudes of our condition. I was still too young to have recourse to this effective blue mass of resignation, still too conscious of the power which a woman feels in her undisputed beauty and charm. But before the year ended I felt the uneasy pain of a disordered future, a future which I had deliberately planned for myself. A woman is often a frivolous predestinarian

in these matters. She lacks the wisdom for the business. She never counts the costs. In an idle hour, in a facetious moment, she resolves something, does something which commits her to frightful consequences, which long afterward casts her naked and bound at the feet of fate.

Occasionally already I felt the premonitions of that hour as I hurled from one gayety to another. I was not able to make ends meet, romantically speaking. Emmet made love to me like a young Mephisto. He kept the house full of the most expensive flowers. He was only too ready to offer handsomer gifts which I dared not receive, feeling dimly that these might be the negotiations for favours I could not afford him.

I do not know why, but it is a fact, we develop faster, learn more in the ways that are not good, that lead through shadows of terrible dangers, than we do in straight and narrow paths of righteousness where we are forbidden to look either to the right or the left. And in a very short time I had the astuteness which enabled me to measure swords with this lover. There were moments when I was alone with him, behind a screen of palms at a dance, or in the library at home, when we became enemies, each determined to overthrow the other. In such a

moment I would snatch my hand from his, spring to my feet in the spirit and place my back to the wall, on guard, keen for the fray, meeting the humour of his narrowed eyes with a smile that all women have laboured to make since the beginning of their hearts. We both understood perfectly. He gave me the impression then of seeking beneath every virtue for the elemental feminine weakness, for that place and that moment when a woman surrenders something with a laugh or a sob. And I knew that at the same time he knew why I hesitated. That I waited for the definite proposal of marriage which he evaded. He was certain that I would accept him. And I think that I should have done so; but I do not believe I would ever have married him. The point was, believing that he could have me for the asking, he was not sure he wanted me. This is characteristic of men. They prefer that woman most whom they are least sure of winning. I knew that he was infatuated with me, but there is nothing further removed from honest love than infatuation in such a man. It is at bottom a form of passionate hatred. The same struggling fury an animal might feel when caught. The only way to escape is to break the spell of fascination which binds him by some devouring victory. This is plainly put, but not nearly so plainly as

nature sometimes dramatizes it in the face of such a lover.

But if I defended myself from Emmet, I defended my heart from David Brock, which was, all told, a more difficult business. For David was not a trifler. And he refused to be trifled with. This much I learned very early in the game. He knew as surely that I loved him as Emmet knew that I wanted a rich husband. He was gifted with a splendid veracity, with a rough tenderness in this matter which no woman could evade with mere coquetry. Coquetry was a thing he despised, one of those light crimes in society which he refused to countenance.

We were sitting out a dance at the famous Franklin cotillion. I wore the coral gown with a bunch of lilies and ferns in my girdle. I had a fillet in my hair, a band of white tulle with the lilies and green woven in it. And suspended from a long strand of pearls which Alice had loaned me for the occasion, I carried a little white web of a fan embroidered in silver. David was looking more ferocious than ever. This was the effect that evening clothes had upon his appearance. They brought out by contrast a certain ugly elemental quality of the man. They darkened him, made an ungainly capital letter of him in the midst of the fine spencerian penmanship of

the other frailer, slimmer-bodied men about him. The shades of ancient heroes looking down, one of them might have exclaimed:

"Jupiter! There is one of us seated there beside the girl who was once a rose in Diana's hair! Anteus, by the looks of him, but he wears shoes like a fool! His heel will do him no good!"

David reached forward timidly, caught the looped pearls in his hand, let them run glistening through his fingers. He kept his eyes upon them. I learned that this was a way he had of revering women, by not looking them in the eye too often, nor too intently.

"You called me the other day," he began.

"I did not," I contradicted, flushing at the remembrance of my mistake.

"You called me over the 'phone," he repeated slowly.

"You called *me;* you said you did," I corrected, laughing.

He lifted his eyes for one moment, covering me with a smile.

"I did not call you. I experienced the happiest amazement of my life when I recognized your voice."

I explained Molly's stupidity in hanging up the receiver. I hastened to clear my skirts.

"But you were thinking of me. That is why

you thought it might have been I who wanted to speak to you?" he half pleaded, half affirmed.

"Yes," I admitted.

"And just before you hung up the receiver, you said, 'Good-bye ——'" He hesitated, looked at me whimsically as if he were too uncertain yet to believe his ears about the remaining part of the farewell.

"Oh, that was to Alice that I said 'Good-bye, dear,'" I laughed.

"Alice! But you were speaking to me!" he protested.

"Some one came in and I didn't want him to know to whom I was speaking," I explained again.

"But you called me that," he insisted gravely.

"No, I called Alice 'dear,'" I cried, amused at his seriousness.

"Joy," he went on after a pause, "I am out of my element here. I do not belong. I came from a different walk of life."

I listened curiously. That was a matter about which Millidge was mystified. No one knew where he did come from.

"And I have lived differently," he went on. "So, I think and feel differently. Things which are important to you here seem to me of no consideration. And other things that are of the greatest consideration to me seem — well, I take

it that they seem light, of no serious import in a company like this." He waved his hand to indicate the whirling throng of dancers in the room beyond the alcove where we were seated.

"I was brought up harshly, where men eliminate trifles and where they do not trifle about what they consider important. They go after what they want, and they get it, whether it is a fortune or a wife! I never saw an idle man nor a flirt until I came here."

"Where on earth have you lived then, in a mine?" I interrupted facetiously.

"Partly, yes. Curious that you should have thought of that! Sometimes for days in the dark, where a man's thoughts are the only light he has except the dim lantern on his cap."

"How interesting! That accounts for something terrible we all feel in you. You've been in the dark so much."

"No, not then. I tell you I had my own thoughts for light then. But now, I'm in the dark. I do not see clearly. I'm completely turned around. All this — it seems meaningless to me. I cannot grasp the — the purpose of it."

"But ——" I interrupted.

"Wait, let me finish. One day when I was very far down in that mine I have told you of, inspecting a new vein of coal, the walls caved. A

great mass of earth and coal fell across the passage through which I had come."

"Oh, how terrible!" I murmured. But he did not hear me. He seemed to have passed into a trance. His face paled, his eyes widened as if he still stared into that frightful darkness.

"At first I tried to get out. I raved, and tore at the stones with my bare hands. Then I gave it up. For two days and nights I was there alone in the blackness before they dug through and took me out. It was terrible, like the grave would be to the living. But the thing which at last filled me with horror was not this loneliness of the grave, but another, deeper grief. I had no one to think of beyond it. No kindred, no one to love, no one who loved me. I realized this, that a man is not made without love. That was what I thought of every moment during the eternity I lay there with my lips to a little crevice in the earth sucking what air through it I could — not, you understand, that I was hungry, or cold, or wet, or about to die, but that I had never loved, never been finished in the image of a man. I resolved if I ever ascended from that pit that I would look for her, a woman to love, and that I would make her love me as no woman ever loved before. I felt I must have that to — to create me — I can't explain it" — he broke off —"but

I tell you I know it is the way a man must feel who has passed out from among the living without ever having felt that kiss upon his lips. He knows he has missed all, including himself. Am I making you understand?"

"I think so," I almost whispered, overcome by the vision of him, the passionate pain for him there in the darkness.

"Well, I've found her, Joy, this woman, where I never expected to find her. It's been like discovering a gem, a little, bright, perishless thing in wind-blown reef of burning grass. I want to, I must, thrust my hand into the blaze and seize it!"

He waited.

I lifted my fan, spread it over my breast.

"I've found you, dear!" he whispered.

"Is it —— Oh! are you thinking of me?"

"Of no other! I thought of you first down there in the terrible blackness, of you whom I had never seen. I began to love you then. That was a year ago. I've loved you, thought of you waking and in my dreams, every hour since. I knew you the first instant my eyes fell upon you a month ago at your ball."

"But you didn't so much as look at me the whole evening!" I chided.

"I saw no one else! You love me?"

"I don't know," I answered trembling.

"You do know. A woman always knows that."

"How?"

"By the beating of her heart, I think!" he answered, smiling a little.

And I knew then that my fan was rising and falling like a wing above a tempest.

"Joy!" came a tinkling, cool voice. "Oh, I knew I should find you in this bosky dell!"

Alice Archibald appeared between the tall palms beside us.

"Joy, fly, my dear! Emmet is raging like a wild hyena through Tara's halls looking for you everywhere. You've missed this dance with him: spoiled the set."

I flew, angry, frightened, feeling that sense of guilt a woman does feel when a man searches her with the light of love. But I was still mistress of myself.

A minute later Emmet found me seated like a sad wallflower in the corner farthest from the alcove.

"Where on earth have you been?" he exclaimed.

"Waiting for you!" I replied in proudly injured tones.

"I've been searching for you these ten minutes!" he protested.

"Well, you couldn't have been very much in

earnest, or you would have found me," I retorted as we swung out upon the floor.

Still he had his suspicions which every occasion confirmed afterward. From that night he began to recognize David, to puzzle over the depth and meaning of his interest in me. And what was more to the point, I felt that he often shrewdly calculated my interest in him.

He made it an excuse for the part he played to me. Such men are dangerous comedians in love. At bottom they regard an attractive woman as the possible enemy of their liberty. They do not love so much as they desire her. And we are different. We only feel the need of being loved. We could do very well indefinitely without any man of whose love we are sure. It is the man of whose love we are not sure that we resent. But we are never the enemy of the other. Only the little clinging parasite of love. It comes near being, but is not quite the same thing.

Emmet was a vandal in this, that he loved, not with the heart of a true man, but with the protecting instincts of a bachelor. He did not want a wife. He preferred to take the lighter rôle of a funny Lancelot to win, but not to keep.

One evening in the early spring of that year, after he knew of David Brock's attentions, we were seated in the arbour beside the gate of the

now faintly blooming old garden. The moon showed a pale yellow disk in the twilight skies, rows of tulips held up their pink and white chalices for the dew, pale blue hyacinth bells mingled their perfume with buttercups. The syringa bushes swung white bridal wreaths in the starry gloom.

He was in one of his sulky moods, which were becoming increasingly frequent. I was silent, wondering what form his peevishness would take, and not daring to show the indignation I felt. This was a patience he had tested before, and which he understood cynically. An evil man always knows the worst of you, even worse than you know of yourself. And there is no power in heaven or earth which can reveal to him your better qualities. He is colour-blind to goodness. I knew the cause of Emmet's thinly veiled anger. And I felt that a man who would not propose himself had no right to resent the attentions other men paid me.

"I saw Margaret to-day," I said finally, resolved to turn the tables on him.

"Where?" he asked indifferently.

"At Deckyard's. You know that ridiculous evening sky annex they have added at the far end of the café? She and Francis were seated back there at a little table having lunch together.

They looked too funny for anything with the blue frescoed hills back of them, with the electric stars shining down upon them through gimlet holes in the ceiling, and the midday sun shining outside!" I laughed.

"Still living by the sword!" was his comment.

"But living!" I retorted.

"Were you chaperoning them?" he asked.

"No, I was having luncheon with David Brock. We had been out looking at West Meadow lots!"

"Thinking of investing?"

"I may, haven't decided," I answered coolly.

"Joy, this has got to stop!" exclaimed Emmet, looking at me with angry eyes.

"What has got to stop?" I asked levelly.

"You have everybody in this town betting, not guessing. You are like a penny they try tossing up to see which of two men will get you."

"Why just two? Are you leaving out Chan Peters, Bunk Hopgood, and Tom Redding, in your little crap game of chance? Perhaps I ought not to betray such confidences, but you force me to tell you that all three of them have asked my hand in marriage, and there's the Honourable Augustus Brown, don't forget him!"

I was furious, and showed the quality of my temper to him for the first time.

"Have you refused them?" he asked, regarding me with a kind of sneering amazement.

"No, I haven't refused anybody!" I cried, springing to my feet and walking swiftly toward the house. He did not follow.

"Scalping is worse than living by the sword, Joy," he called after me. "Not a square deal, and victims have been known to survive who accomplished strange vengeance!"

During the next hour, lying face downward upon my bed in my dark room, I wept and took account of myself. I was no longer innocent of myself. That great guilt had come upon me. No one who lives and thinks can escape it, this intimate knowledge of evil real or potential in the human heart.

I knew that I had been false to Emmet, whom I did not love at all. I knew that day by day I was being false to David, whom I did love, but to whom I refused to become engaged. And I knew clearly the reason why.

Emmet's fortune was made. He had inherited it. There was no doubt about it. But the fate of the broker of the West Meadow Land Company still trembled in the balance. Still I knew that the only reason I could even bear the impudently offensive courtship of Emmet was because I was sure of David. I lived upon the love

of one, while I angled for the proposal of the other.

When I reached this astonishingly lucid view of myself and the situation, I sat up, brushed the hair from my eyes and stared across the room into the mirror, a shining surface in the mellow light streaming through the transom above the door. I saw there only the shadowy image of my face, blurred, marred, darkly distorted by refracted rays. It was too nearly emblematic of my inner self. I ran to the switch and turned on the lights. Then, looking over my shoulder again into the mirror, I addressed the rosy, tear-stained face it held between masses of tumbled golden hair.

"Don't be a goose, dear! Hold fast what the gods give you — and get the rest. You must do the best for yourself. Nobody else will do it for you. Not love, certainly. Love is a poor provider, they say."

I was not repentant. Women do not repent easily. It is a concession too damaging to their morals. It implies the admission that they have sinned. No decent woman knows how to do that. I was still decent enough, merely unscrupulous, merely in doubt about my hand. Uncertain which card to lead, vastly concerned to know whether I held trumps or not.

We all have the eavesdropping instinct — brought it up with us from that ambushing existence we formerly lived in the jungle. We curb it, of course, by way of setting the proper example to others, not to overhear what we say ourselves privately. But there is not a man on the streets who would not take advantage of it if by some strange telepathy he could suddenly know the thoughts of those who passed him, even to the humblest beggar. He would never come to his destination. He would prowl all day listening, listening, knowing that he was beyond suspicion of his crime, that he would not be compelled to pay the penalty of it by forfeiting the respect of his fellows. Nothing would drive him to cover but the realization that the beggar and every man and every woman who went by also read his thoughts. One moment of such nakedness would send the most innocent flying from the face of man as some of us who really do believe in omniscience sneak into agnosticism by way of taking refuge from the awful presence of God. Each would stand accused. None could bear it, the electric of another's intelligence in that secret place — deep as the pit, narrow as the womb, and dark as the heart of a man!

This, I say, is what men would do. They would become hermits dwelling in the secret

places of the earth, anywhere out of sight and out of the mind of other men. But not so women! The more they could discover of each other and of men, the more would they walk abroad to do it. Curiosity, that pale passion of the helpless, inspires them for a thousand adventures. For a woman is the only being in this world who will stand outside the sacred door of her own heart where the spirit forbids that even she shall enter, and with her ear to the keyhole she will not only eavesdrop her own deeper secrets, but she will record them, proclaim them by way of betraying the rest of her sex. Modesty forsakes her. Modesty is her garment, not her nature.

This, I believe, is what I am doing now, betraying one Joy Marr. Put your ear to the keyhole. The story is only beginning. You will get the inside version of an outside situation, all too familiar in society. I make no excuse. I even defend the action, this revelation. When we are known, even as we suspect others, light, the only true light, will have come in the world. There will be no need then for laws and governments. We shall fear the awful judgment of each too much, and walk correctly, softly, and humbly accordingly. We shall refurnish our hearts with better appearing motives and ambitions. It will be like stringing arc lights in the darkest streets of a great

city where vice and crime have before walked hand in hand. After that there is a change. Pale virtues step forth to take the air. Soberness and charity and peace become foot passengers in that thoroughfare. It is not such a bad thing to tell your own truth — only expensive. Destroys you, but it may save others.

CHAPTER SIX

I HELD my place in the "Vanity Fair" of Millidge for two years, which was a year longer than the average belle blooms. A débutante is a kind of annual. Even if she does not fade, she does not last among the fresher posies.

At twenty, I was far handsomer, more really beautiful than I had been at eighteen. And I was infinitely more accomplished in the arts of social life. That in fact was the first disqualification I developed for the position I held — I had become too adroit. I no longer acted upon impulse, those quick moods which show the elemental egregiousness of human nature, and prove sincerity. The very truth that I lived was a lie, now recognized by the other liars. I had earned a reputation for finesse. This is dangerous, even fatal. Nobody believes you when you speak. No one is sure you are really merry when you laugh. Your very tears are pearls of doubt. All are lines spoken in the play of the hour, the fine speeches so adequate, the laughter, so finely modulated, and the tears. The younger

girls have the advantage, because at first they do these same things naturally.

Thus my fitness had become my unfitness. To succeed one must always be able to change one's rôle and take another part gracefully. I had not that part offered me. I was not engaged to become anybody's wife. Not only that, but I discovered that I must give up the character I had obtained and played for the preceding two years. Mabel Leigh was now the belle of Millidge, a little wren of a girl, with a natural coyness which sent her tittering behind the primrose leaves of her own modesty upon every occasion. She merely peeped at her lovers and held them by this method.

There were other changes even more direful to contemplate. These were due to the fact that my heart was not the only property man working out details behind the scenes. No one man nor any woman ever gets a corner in the great theatricals of life. There are too many other managers who have controlling stock in that business. Your neighbour may drop your curtain for you and take the centre of the stage in the next act.

This is what happened in my own case. The preparations had been going forward for some time, not deliberately nor spitefully, but inevitably, like the forces of nature.

I remember well the day when for the first time the fear that I had lost my cue became conviction.

It was early in November, a clear, sparkling afternoon, filled with a keen wind which carried the leaves before it from the elms, lifted them from the ground and sent them whirling past the library windows, like wreaths of yellow butterflies. I was seated alone inside by the fire, pretending to read, but the magazine lay in my lap, folded over my fingers. I was wondering vaguely why no one had asked me to go to the football game at that moment in progress. The shouts of the players and spectators came to me faintly from the university campus, which lay back of our house. My young squires were squiring younger girls, I thought, smiling idly. It made no difference. I had never been interested in any of them. Still, I reflected, one missed the attention. My mind passed with a quicker, firmer grasp to other matters more important.

If these two years had changed me, they had made greater changes in David Brock. He was now one of the most accomplished men, socially, in the town, and by all odds the most popular. He went everywhere, and with everybody. That singular darkness, that strange intimation of unconquered forces, in him, was no longer apparent.

He did the usual things, golfed, danced, drank, flirted, and did them all better than those who had been born to these pastimes and indulgences. The way the twig is bent, the tree will grow, sounds like an axiom, but if there is a man in the world whose life does not contradict that proverb, it is merely the accident of environment. Change that, and you are apt to see a changed man.

The change in David had been almost brilliantly rapid. I believe I was myself the barometer of it. He became the chameleon of my moods, courting me at first seriously, with the ardour and sincerity of an honest and devoted man. Later, when he had acquired the more facile manner of a man of the world, when he saw and understood too clearly to cherish his first illusions either of me or of the company we both kept, he continued to court me lightly, almost facetiously, like one who still clung with a kind of amusement to one reality — the reality of first love. Neither of us understood that process of mind by which such realities become mere memories. But this is a law as inevitable as the law of change in matter. Nothing lasts as it is. The great and small experiences, the most passionate loves and hatreds, all fade into the dim text of memory. They are those strange invisible mortalities in us

that must put on immortality by perishing out the present into the past. They belong to it, as we belong to the dust. And they make it, as we make that fertile soil from which other lives spring. So, since the science of metaphysics was no part of the course we took in social economics, neither David nor I anticipated what must happen, nor knew when it did happen. We had both become moths, singeing our wings in another flame long before we suspected the tragedy that had overtaken us.

Once late in that second summer as we motored together along a fragrant country road, David turned to me and said:

"Come, Joy, marry me. Be a good sport and take your chances for fortune with me."

"But, David, it may be misfortune," I replied, for I no longer concealed from him the reason I had for not accepting him.

"And you are not willing to risk that — with me?" he asked soberly.

"No, nor with any man. I've had enough of that; I want a change."

"That settles it!" he said, beginning to speed the car.

"No," I protested, "only defers it."

"How many times have you refused me, Joy?"

"Never! I have only asked you to wait," I insisted.

"Meaning that if I fail, you will not marry me at all!" he laughed harshly.

"But you will not fail!"

"Still, you are not sure enough of it to be willing to marry me."

"Oh, David, dear, can't you be patient?" I said, thrusting my hand under his gloved one upon the wheel.

"And take a girl who frankly waited to see if I'd make a fortune before she'd have me? You are a cool one!" he retorted.

"It is only being sensible," I pleaded, withdrawing my hand.

"That's all!" he answered sternly.

We were coming up a long incline that lay densely shaded by a thick forest. At the top, the trees halted and the road descended like a white ribbon through a valley, fields of corn in the distance, and fields of wheat stubble, with faded shocks of straw in them on either side. On the farthest side there was a little gray farmhouse, standing so close to the ground that the earth rose green against one corner of it, as if the two were intimate. The gables spread wide beneath the sheltering trees, the sun mottling the mossy roof with leaf shadows.

"Look!" exclaimed David, stopping the car upon the brow of the hill.

"That, Joy, is what love does for the earth. The man who lives in that house is poor. His wife married him when he was even poorer. They have made this scene, little by little, year by year, as their love grew and as their children came. Love built that house, fertilized those fields, made that corn grow, sowed and reaped that wheat. Love is the creator, the great husbandman. Wherever you see life, you may know that Love has gone before. Every man, every tree, every flower that blooms is the issue of love. Before those two tremendous words. In the Beginning, long before that, Love moved across the great void, divided the light from the dark, the land from the sea. And the grass sprung, covering the naked hills where the dew-drenched skirts of Love trailed the evening and morning of the first day. Every star that shines was made so. The moon is the divorced wife of Love because she could not bring forth. That is the Primal Cause, the generator of all creations, mother of life — of everything but money. Greed made that."

"No, need!" I defended.

"Never! The inventor of currency was the original Dives, who bartered bright pieces of

metal, useless to him, for the pelts and ivory and spices that the savages offered in exchange. Savages made necklaces of the metal, and Dives built himself greater barns and storehouses for his wealth. Savages became poorer, he became richer. That is the history of money to this day. It's an imagination created and sustained by greed and vanity. Love is the only one who has escaped the curse, a pauper with smiling eyes who fills the heart with riches, and leaves the hands empty and strong for service. You, Joy, do not understand what kind of wealth that is. It is the excuse I make for you. You have been anæsthetized by the life you live. I have been, myself. I am not the man I was when I came to this place. And you are not the woman I first knew. You are just a young jade offering your little pelt for a few pieces of gold. You ——"

"Don't! David, you hurt!" I sobbed.

"And what about me? Have I not suffered, trailing you through the burning grass of what we call society? God knows how much! I begin to wonder if you are worth it!"

The throbbing engine of the car gave a rasping snicker and we began to move swiftly through the valley. As we passed the house, a woman came to the door with a child in her arms and stared at us, smiling. The child waved its tiny hand.

I was now recalling this ride, every incident of it, as I gazed into the fire. I was saying to myself that I had had some peace of mind since that day when I had made David understand once and for all how I felt. Still, I reflected uneasily, that was the last time we had been alone together, and the last time he had made love to me.

The door-bell rang, and the next moment Alice tripped in, her face flushed, her eyes sparkling with excitement.

"Why, Joy dear, what are you doing sitting in by the fire like an old maid! Why weren't you at the game?" she cried.

"I don't know," I answered dully, "was it good?"

"Splendid! Millidge won by a score of nine to nothing."

I went to tell Molly to bring the tea. When I came back, Alice was seated with her feet propped up on the fender, pulling off her gloves.

"Were many out?" I asked.

"Everybody in town but you. I came by to see what was the matter. Emmet was there with Margaret Derry. He's beginning his attentions to her again. And you should have seen that little fool, Mabel Leigh, when Bunk Hopgood kicked the goal. Simply lost her head and screeched like a kitten with its tail caught in the door. Chan

was with her. Everybody laughed. We had no idea she could show so much enthusiasm. So genuine too. It was charming. She's going to be a success."

While she talked in her pretty, breathless fashion, she scanned me, questioned me with her blue, inquisitive eyes.

"And David Brock, whom did he take?" I asked.

"Oh, he took me. Charlie couldn't go. I excused him when I came in to see you. He couldn't stop. Said he had an appointment with those men at West Meadow."

There was a perceptible pause during which my mind slowly approached her, sniffing mischief, and my property man lay down behind the scene and had a hard fit.

"Have you heard the news?" she began again, as if nothing had happened, as if the whole scene of my life was not in the wildest disorder.

"No, what news is there — somebody's engagement announced?" I asked with the tone of one who is secretly dying and does not want to make a fuss about it.

"Better than that! David has sold the remaining lots at West Meadow to some capitalists from Birmingham, for exactly one hundred thousand dollars! Isn't it great?"

"It certainly is," I answered.

"It's all in the afternoon paper. And his friends are so enthusiastic. They gave him a dinner last night at the Terrace, and Charlie says David got as drunk as a lord!" she laughed.

"David drunk? I can't imagine such a thing!" I exclaimed.

"I couldn't either. Charlie says he can carry more highballs than any man in town. But nobody ever saw him off his feet before."

"I didn't know he drank at all," I put in.

"He didn't at first, you know. But I imagine he took that on as he has taken on everything else. Wonderful man. So adjustable."

We sipped our tea, Alice still radiant and chattering, I making the necessary replies with an effort which I could only hope was not observed.

After what seemed to me an interminable time, she took her departure.

"I'll see you at the Leighs' to-night, I suppose?" she called from the door.

"Oh, yes!" I answered, recalling as if from some past century that I had promised Tom Redding to go with him to the dance the Leighs were giving that evening.

The capacity for reaction depends upon one's quality. Those persons who cannot accomplish it have anæmia of the spirit. They lack the

spiral instinct of ascension. They are the dust that shall oversleep themselves in the last day, and come too late, with dull, dream-laden eyes, to their resurrection, and they will never be able to really live again. We, the brightly redeemed sinners, shall find them still laid in some shining cemetery upon the fragrant outskirts of Paradise. The Lord himself will not be able to impart to them the rarefied breath of immortality. That cemetery! It is likely to prove an endless, measureless Arlington of dead fames!

As for me, I have the gift of reaction. It is the drum-beat of life in me, never to die, never to surrender to adverse fate. I made my last sensation as the reigning beauty of Millidge that night at the Leighs'. It was not the appearance of a woman who dims herself with a gown of superior brilliance. I had made a study by this time of the use and abuse of clothes. I had discovered that the woman never appears when her gown is too apparent. The office of feminine garments is not to conceal but to reveal the woman, not her form, but to call attention to that slim occult presence she makes if she is wise enough.

I chose for this occasion a green chiffon, not bright, but that pale youth of emerald which young buds show in the early spring, before the sun dyes them to a deeper hue. Green is the

most significant of all colours, the most suggestive of life and mystery. It is the symbol of hope and survival in nature, the colour of the banner that the earth raises first after the long death of winter days, the herald that the frozen sod sends forth of coming blossoms. So, with the bloom of all my hopes withering within, I put on this challenge to the future over white chiffon embroidered with gold leaves. There was a band of coral velvet in the bodice, merely the colour of the rose of life. I bound my hair in braids as close to my head as the golden brown of apple blossoms. My face was the blossom. And suspended by fine links of gold around my neck I wore a little emerald cut in the shape of a heart and set in pearls. Over all I wore the radiance of my unconquerable spirit, that effulgence of mysterious light from within which women sometimes wear so becomingly like a scarf over their naked shoulders, visible and wonderful.

We came in late. The ballroom was like the moving pictures of a flower garden, as if sheaves of lilies, and slender bunches of roses and pale blue bells, all inverted, had suddenly moved from their roots in the soil and were dancing with long, black, forked branches from the trees above.

I swung out, with Tom Redding, and took my place in the looped wreath of dancers, a slender

wand of willow green conscious of distinction, of he murmured compliments on every side, yet vaguely distressed. This was the first time at a ball that I had not at least half the the numbers on my favour taken before it began. Now I did not have one. The possibility of being a wall decoration faced me. And in the course of the evening I faced it. I was not engaged to Tom Redding, therefore he could not continue to dance with me, number after number. And after a waltz with Bunk Hopgood, and the same good-natured attention from Chan Peters, I found myself reduced to the Honourable Augustus Brown, who capered like a monkey through a two-step, then sat out the next dance with me, being too breathless to undertake it. We sat watching the others. Emmet Marshall was Margaret Derry's partner as often as he could get her. Once he passed me on his way to claim her, bowed with exaggerated gallantry, and looked back over his shoulder facetiously at my emaciated little cavalier, cross legged, ludicrously complacent beside me.

When I could bear him no longer, I arose, excused myself upon some pretext, and slipped quietly out of the drawing-room into the adjoining sun parlour, a long observatory filled with palms and pots of flowering plants, and lighted softly with a strand of large lanterns decorated with

Chinese figures. As I advanced, walking rapidly, with the instinct of one escaping from a nightmare, I was conscious of the odour of a cigarette, very faint, very fine. The next moment I came upon David Brock lounging upon a little white bench between two palms, with his arms stretched along the back of the bench.

"Oh! I didn't know any one was here!" I exclaimed, startled, then advanced with a smile as he stood up.

"Came out for a smoke between acts," he laughed, dropping the end of his cigarette on the stone floor and pressing it with the toe of his shoe to extinguish it.

"Well, I'm glad I found you at any rate," I said, holding out my hand. "I want to congratulate you upon your success."

"Yes, thank you! I've sacrificed enough for it," he answered.

"We are all rejoicing over it," I added timidly, dropping my hand, which he had not taken.

"And must I condole with you upon the loss of a devoted attendant?" he laughed, motioning his head at the figure of Emmet Marshall, whom we both saw inside with Margaret Derry.

"Oh! Emmet," I replied laughing; "that is an old affair, I believe. He was in love with Mrs. Derry before I ever knew him."

We stood facing each other, David looking at me with his black eyes narrowed, his thick lips curled in an impudent smile, like a particularly wicked night staring sneeringly into the next morning.

"David!" I murmured, "what is the matter?"

"Nothing! Why?"

"Yes, there is!" I persisted. "What is the trouble between us?"

"No trouble between us, Miss Marr; nothing between us now; not a darned thing! Used to be. I used to be in love with you! Remember?"

"I do remember, dear. I, I ——"

"Well, it's all over, thank you!" he interrupted quickly, harshly. "A fellow sometimes comes to himself with a jerk. Gets to his feet, you know, and sees things in their right proportion. Your faithful lover never does. He creates an illusion of some woman and falls in love with that, not her. Fortunate thing if he gets his eyes open in time and discovers his mistake, finds out that women are not made for love, but for pastime, for ——"

"Stop, David! You are saying awful things that are not true!" I cried with my hand over my heart.

"Then you are not true either, Joy. It was from you, from studying you, that I acquired this knowledge," he answered sternly.

"But I want to explain, David," I said, attempting to detain him.

"Can't listen now: just time to get to Mrs. Archibald before the next dance," he laughed.

I sat down upon the bench, and looked after him in bitter amazement. How had all this happened so suddenly? Or was it sudden? I asked myself. I reviewed the preceding months, recalled how often of late I had seen David and Alice together, and remembered the picture she made with him in the hot sunlit booths of the State Fair in September. How amused I was at her interest in the egregious exhibits of corn and pumpkins. The sight of her running about through the stock exhibits, like a doll, pretending terror when the pigs came forward and grunted, being obliged to fly with David. I recalled not intelligently for the first time the peculiar, enigmatical expression upon Emmet's face as we followed in their wake. And Alice! She had been more affectionate, had done many of those little favours a rich woman could do for a less fortunate friend. She had given me a bertha of real lace for one of my summer frocks. It was she who had arranged that I should go in the car with Emmet when a party of us went upon an automobile tour through the country to a little summer resort in the mountains above Millidge. David had taken the Archibalds in his new car.

I began to laugh hysterically at my blindness. I caught a lily from the pot beside me, bent the frail stem and began to tear the bloom. It was as if I had Alice by the throat. My knees were covered with white petals, the air was filled with their bruised fragrance, that cry of a wounded flower.

"Dreaming here alone with the posies?" came a voice near at hand.

I looked up and saw Charlie Archibald regarding me intently. I had not heard him approach and I wondered, but not resentfully, how long he had been standing there eavesdropping my thoughts.

"No, I'm walking in my sleep!" I answered, making room for him beside me.

"Don't! Bad habit, might fall out of the window, or over a precipice!" he replied whimsically, taking out his cigarette case.

"Mind if I smoke?"

"No, please do. Wish I could myself!"

"Why not? Soothes the nerves sometimes," he laughed, offering me one of his little gold banded Dieties.

"Must I?" taking the thing in my fingers awkwardly and looking at him.

"Yes! do you good under the circumstances. When in doubt about what to do next, commit a transgression! Sometimes saves you from com-

mitting a crime. Changes the current of the thoughts. Brings you home by way of the back door. Centres your mind where it belongs, upon yourself. Lifts the scene again. Makes you wonder what will happen when you are found out. Relaxes all the other tensions and attentions," he laughed, holding the burning end of his cigarette to mine, now gingerly held between my lips.

The smoke curled up in my face.

"There! you do it very prettily, like a débutante in the vice," he said, regarding me with smiling eyes.

"Feel better?" he asked presently.

"Yes, I do!" I giggled.

"Drop it then, before you feel worse. Tobacco sickness is not an experience a young woman ought to have at a ball."

I yielded the remainder of the cigarette, dizzily excited, vaguely stimulated. We remained silent while he finished his.

"Want to dance?"

"I — I believe I do!"

"Come on, then! You'll have to dance with me, you know, other fellows would find you out if you took one of them for a partner. Fragrance of that tobacco will cling to you for an hour!" he laughed as we made our way back to the ballroom.

CHAPTER SEVEN

A LITTLE thing happens, and you are changed. It is like turning the key in a lock — as easy as that — and you pass through the door of what you were into what you are going to be. You may have struggled, beat your hands upon that same door in the effort to escape, then suddenly you do something unawares, by accident you get the right combination, and presto! it swings wide and you are free again. That is a kind of conversion, but not always religious.

When I entered the ballroom again upon Charlie Archibald's arm, I was not the distracted, outraged Joy Marr who had left it, nor the girl who had a few moments before pleaded for a reconciliation with David Brock, nor the angry, helpless woman who had torn the lily to shreds. Something lived in me that had never lived before. The fumes of the tobacco had stimulated an undercurrent, had lighted the head of the serpent above my dove. You may say what you please about artificial stimulation, but it depends upon the mood you are in what effect it has upon

you. If you want to write a hymn, a blasphemously strong cocktail may inspire you to religious frenzy, but if you want to kill a man, three cocktails may give a coward dreadful courage. I did not want to compose a sacred poem, nor to commit murder, but I desired to survive a disastrous situation with becoming animation. To become intoxicated with the strength of one's own soul is to pass beyond the need of any other. Your real egotist is a sublime ass capable of removing mountains by his faith, not in God, but in himself.

As we glided through the mazes of the next dance, my head against Charlie's shoulder, his arm about my waist, my feet became wings, my spirit the body of a green butterfly.

We passed Alice and David, the former swaying before him like a little blue flame, his eyes bent upon her bright head.

"What are you laughing at?" Charlie whispered.

"I don't know exactly, but I think it is at the sensation of being all here," I murmured, still laughing.

"You are drunk, my lady!"

"Well, it's not delirium tremens then, but delirium gaudens," I retorted in murdered Latin.

"Your beverages must have always been water and tea."

"Cambric tea at that!" I returned.

We are not discovered by sight after all, but by the vibrations from that invisible cloud of witnesses which accompany every spirit. And Moses and Elijah are not often among them in a ballroom. My witnesses were all reeling, they were doing a fancy skirt dance in the air of that astonished place which my own motions faintly suggested. Before the waltz ended I knew that I had created a sensation, that I had become the beam in every eye in the room. As Charlie led me to a seat half a dozen men surrounded me.

"Say, Joy, give me the next waltz? I want to dance with a dryad," pleaded Chan Peters.

"Joy, give it to me?" interrupted Bunk Hopgood, snatching at my favour. "I've danced many a time with you, but never with the daughter of Pan!"

While they disputed over the next number, Emmet Marshall thrust them apart and seized it.

"Lady Hamilton, give me the next dance!" he cried with open admiration.

"No, Chan has it!" I answered.

"Then the next!"

"Bunk Hopgood has that one," I laughed.

"Well, all the others after that!" he insisted.

"You may have one, the third," I consented.

During the remainder of the evening I was again the belle of Millidge. Only once, at the

very end, when I was sitting out next to the last dance with Charlie, did my spirit flag.

Two women were seated a little distance farther down the room on the same side.

"Joy Marr is the handsomest girl here to-night, and still the most popular," said one.

"And the most disappointed," said the other. "David Brock has not been near her the whole evening. That's what her gayety means. She's bluffing." We heard her distinctly. I felt the blood stinging my temples, and a mist rising before my vision. Charlie's eyes never left my face. But they changed now like the eyes of a knight who bears a wounded comrade from the field.

"Merely the crackling of burning grass, Joy. Don't mind it," he murmured, quoting a phrase I knew he had got from David.

"Wonder how Charlie Archibald feels watching his wife dance with that drunken adventurer all night!" came the same voice again. "Everybody in town is talking about them."

"Find Tom Redding for me, Charlie. It's late and I promised father to come home early," I said, by way of bearing my wounded comrade from the field.

This dance was the beginning of the most luridly gay winter ever known in Millidge society.

The old town, which was staid and straight-laced at bottom, witnessed a sensation which became a sort of quadrangular scandal. Alice and David were the principal characters. Charlie and I were simply the lay figures. Alice and I were inseparable, not because we were friends, but because we were enemies. I was obliged to keep up the appearances of friendship, or acknowledge jealousy and defeat. Charlie became the boon companion of David. He entered the peonage which is so often the fate of a man who marries a woman not designed by nature to the long term of wifehood, but for the transient part of a passing mistress. He could only defend his honour by protecting the author of his dishonour. It is the way such victims have of saying, "My wife is a good woman, and our friend is a good fellow."

Alice accomplished this situation with heightening colour and an innocent gayety that was as confusing as it was authoritative.

God creates us, and we make ourselves. It is a frightful mistake, because we lack the right genius for that business. We made the wrong beginning in the beginning. Since Eve went back to Adam and showed so plainly by the fruit in her hand that Satan was hidden somewhere in the shrubbery, we have been pretending to try to discover who was the author of evil. I say

pretending, because we really know. Satan never existed at all until she produced him, the first form of a woman's idle curiosity and restless nature. She was looking for an adventure, and found the devil, created him out of the tediousness of too much peace and quietness. No woman can endure that. He was simply the forked stick she used to flail down the apple she wanted. That is the truth. She may not have known it. She would not have admitted it if she did. Women are gifted at not knowing what they do. But we have been using the same forked stick ever since for the same purpose. It is merely a prim, sneaking anti-theological evasion to pretend that we do not know the origin of evil. It was our own first invention, the great patent we took out upon human destiny, the terrible and expensive device we use to make life more interesting, and, by the same token, less good.

I will not say that Alice was the only woman in Millidge who had the forked stick in her hand, but she certainly knew how to use it. And I do not say that such women accomplish most of the evil in the world. They lack the courage and initiative for that. But they do inspire most of it, either by their vanity or their selfishness. They look innocent only because somebody else does their worst work for them. But they are

not innocent, merely outrageously irresponsible. They keep no honest account of the deeds done out of their bodies where they are most dangerous. They manipulate the record even in their prayers. And few of them can ever be brought to judgment, because they have idiot consciences. You cannot damn an idiot, and you cannot save one. There must be some private means for disposing of them beyond our power to conceive of. But in my opinion there is some reason for the masculine pronoun used in the Scriptures to denote angels and saints. Certainly the very gender of Alice's nature must be changed before she can qualify.

She and David were blinded by their infatuation. Alice, at least, could not see herself as others saw her. They became the sensational headlines of Millidge society. It was as if the devil had stepped boldly forth to dance with Eve upon the innocent green. They gave a sinister aspect to every occasion. No one knew what to do about it. The devil is entertained no less by the best people than by the worst. The difference is that the former only receive him incognito before their friends. He must wear the uniform of respectability, and submit to the customs of polite virtues, and not show his forked tail in his evening clothes by paying too much attention, say, to another man's wife. When he does that, proper

people take counsel against him. They start a reform or a revival, they cast him not out of their lives, but out of the public eye. They put the "lid" on. It is no place for him to be showing himself in the narrow, squinted, discerning eye of the public. It is like reducing all the skeletons in everybody's closet to the least common denominator on a bulletin board, like letting every one else's right hand know what your left one may have been doing in the dark all the time. Such honesty ceases to be a virtue and becomes a scandal.

The trouble in Millidge was that no one could determine which was the devil. For David went about his damnation with a heroic valour that approached sublimity. He did not have the shame of his performance. He took it for granted that the thing would be understood, and did not care. Men have a mournful courage at this business which women lack. Alice missed no opportunity to keep up appearances. She was as cowardly as she was vicious. She accepted invitations that winter, which she would have refused formerly, to dull parties given by women who were positively dimmed and quarantined by their reputations for prosperity. And she was exceedingly active for the first time in good works — a fatal sign of anxiety in your women of doubt-

ul reputation. Before Christmas she had a ooth at the charity bazaar. She endeared her- elf by helping to serve a Christmas dinner for oor children. And she moved through all these ccasions like a little blue-eyed novitiate seeking arnestly to be of some service. It was the Tammany method she adopted to make her alling and election sure in this world. Like that reat institution, she also sent little curved- andled spoons to the forlorn new-born babes of he indigent poor, and now and then a ton of oal to the United Charities for destitute families. t was a frightfully inclement winter, and she sed every bad day of it to conceal her identity. do not know what the poor will do when the est of the world becomes really upright and with mpudently clean records. They will probably tarve to death. For the major part of the harity given now is the hush money offered by ice in one form or another for a good reputation. The Lord moves in mysterious ways his young avens to feed; and it is no reflection upon His oving kindness that He does. We have never ot together enough virtues to make ends meet. t is a part of the miracle of His great providence hat our transgressions also form a part of the conomy of His mercies.

In all this pseudo Christian endeavouring of

Alice I was her diligent handmaiden. I had to be. You cannot refuse to make handkerchief bags and pincushions for a friend's booth in the bazaar when you are under obligations for a real lace bertha, for the loan of her jewels, and for a hundred other favours. I did not share the confusion of Millidge about her real character, for Millidge could not make up its mind whether she was a sweet soul struggling piously to break through the snare of a great temptation, or whether she was a little scarlet woman disguised in blue and charity. She was neither. Such women find health in snares, and they are never honest enough to become scarlet. Their feet take hold upon hell daintily. They do not actually sink into the mire. They have a light discretion which keeps them above that. They are gifted with web-footed vice. All this I understood. But I was not in a position to proclaim her in her truly pied colours. I had some doubtful colouring of my own. I was an acknowledged member of the fast set in town, which has its disadvantages even when one manages to hold fast the essential virtue. It was known that I was a conscienceless coquette, reaping other women's lovers with the skill of an accomplished harvester of these poor tares.

Moreover, I had achieved the reckless humour of an adventuress. I had become the student of

terrible situation, a little force camping without the gates of a besieged castle, waiting for its fall. I deliberately computed the length of time it would require for Alice to lose her hold upon David, and I meant to be within the walls when he did.

David was always in evidence. He wore the air of a man who has penetrated the mask of respectability in a certain circle of nice society and scorned it accordingly. In him veracity was a quality, not a virtue. It is the characteristic of some of the best and worst of men, a colossal integrity which lifts even shame upon a great canvas. He never attempted to hide his infatuation for Alice, nor disguised the nature of it, as he did. No one could see them together without divining that his passion for her was based upon a keen hatred of her. She knew this herself, and enjoyed it like a fool risking the mood of a madman. This hatred is the explanation of those tragedies in the underworld of shame. Men always hate the women who betray them. Love is not love. It is the fever of this fury. And such women are always merciless in the exercise of their power. They sacrifice, suffer everything but the yielding of their dreadful hold upon the victim. Alice knew, as every one else did in Millidge by this time, that David was not only neglecting

his legitimate business, but he was engaged in the wildest speculations. He had lost the sense of proportion, and he committed the most reckless affronts with an insouciance that was overwhelming. I was myself the victim of one of these.

The Charity Bazaar was in full swing upon one of the principal business streets uptown. One afternoon I went in to choose some gifts. It was that hour when the crowd of Christmas shoppers were thickest between the double row of booths. The floor was wet with the slush of snow brought in by many feet. I stood within the door, observing the noisy throng, listening to the clatter of a hundred feminine voices, and smiling at the awkward efforts of the society matrons of Millidge to become successful shop-girls. With that decorum characteristic of them, they had chosen to exclude the girls and manage the sales themselves. They had not been successful. Trade demands charm more than any other profession. They had only honesty. Mrs. Gill-filling was trying to sell an enormous cake. She was standing behind a counter laden with preserves and candies and cakes, screaming with the eloquence of a patent-medicine man. But in vain. Women who would have crawled upon their knees to get an invitation to one of her receptions, looked coldly at her display, listened

impudently to her protestations of their excellence, and passed on.

Mrs. Buckhaulter, who sat sulking in the back of her stall, beckoned to me.

"Joy, I wish you would come in here and sell some of these things. I've suffered more humiliation to-day than in all the years of my life before, and to no purpose!" she exclaimed as I came across to her.

"I'll do the best I can!" I laughed, taking my place behind the counter piled high with embroidery aprons and boudoir caps and other useless, pretty things.

"Look at that woman coming in the door! She's been here twice before to-day, made me show her everything, and then walked off without making a single purchase; she's our groceryman's wife!" exclaimed the old lady in high dudgeon.

A large woman advanced, with wide vacant eyes, as if she were walking in her sleep.

"I'm looking for something to give a friend, and I just can't find a single thing that seems appropriate," she explained, leaning upon the counter.

"We don't keep octagon soap. That's what you really want!" grumbled Mrs. Buckhaulter in a whisper behind me.

"One of these aprons would be nice," I suggested holding up a tiny square of muslin with pockets trimmed with lace.

"I don't think she could wear a thing like that," objected the customer.

"How about one of these boudoir caps? They are so pretty." I offered one for inspection, with the ingratiating air of a shopgirl.

"That, that — wouldn't do at all!" she exclaimed, looking back at it almost in alarm as she lifted her ponderous bust from the counter and moved on.

"What you want is the fulness of the earth with a yellow ribbon tied around it and a green aigrette stuck in the top!" screamed Mrs. Buckhaulter furiously after her. Fortunately the din in the room drowned her voice.

At this moment David Brock sauntered in looking more like a brigand than ever with the the collar of his great coat turned up, and the brim of his soft hat turned back from his flushed face. He paused in front of Alice Archibald's stall, leaned against it, regarding her with humorous eyes, as if her disguise amused him. She wore a black frock with a white fichu crossed low upon her bosom.

"David Brock!" shouted Mrs. Buckhaulter, springing to her feet.

He turned and looked across at the sound of his name. She beckoned to him frantically.

He shouldered his way through the crowd, which was now increased by the advent of many young men coming in from their offices.

"Good afternoon, ladies!" he said, removing his hat and bowing low. "Did you call me?"

"Yes, I want you to do me a favour to offset some of the mischief you are doing all the time," she demanded.

"What is it? I am an innocent man, more sinned against than sinning, I assure you. Still if I'd committed all the transgressions in the world I'd be glad to balance accounts with favours to you, Madam!"

"Shut up! I am no kitten!" she snapped. "I want you to get up here and auction off the things in this bazaar. We can't sell them, and I'm sick and tired of the whole business."

He glanced at me darkly, as if suddenly he took counsel against me.

"Want me to sell everything, every single thing?" he bargained whimsically.

"Yes, if you can, everything that hasn't been disposed of," she agreed.

"Good! I'll do it. But remember the agreement," he added mysteriously. He turned to Bunk Hopgood, who was standing behind him.

"Bunk, run over there to the hardware store and borrow the most raucous dinner bell they've got!" he commanded.

Five minutes later the crowd was electrified by the furious clanging of this bell and by the sight of David Brock standing upon the counter of Mrs. Buckhaulter's stall, slinging it in wide circles above their heads.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he shouted in stentorian bass, "I have been employed to sell at auction to the highest bidder this entire stock of goods at prices never heard of before in this town. Company going out of business. Everything must be disposed of before you leave this room. Close the doors. Bunk, let all in who apply for admission, fifty cents per head, but not a single person out till the last pincushion is sold!" Hopgood hastened to obey amid screams of protestation and yells of laughter.

"Here, Chan, take this bell, get outside and drum up the crowd," he said, dropping the bell, still clanging, into Peter's hands, who immediately rushed through the doors. And for the next hour the din of it mixed with his high tenor voice could be heard within. "*Greatest event of the year — society auctioning off its clothing, down to the last garment, behind these doors.*" *Rang! clang! clang!* "*Nothing like it ever been seen in the civilized*

world. Everybody admitted! Price fifty cents! Only fifty cents to see the fairest of the fair in Millidge selling their lingerie to feed the poor and clothe the naked!"

A steady stream of men and women with curious and astonished faces began to pour into the immense hall. Bunk could not make change fast enough to admit them. They struggled frantically.

Meanwhile, David had seized the first thing his hand fell upon, which happened to be a pair of gray foot-warmers. He held them up admiringly.

"We have here a pair of sneakers," he shouted, "suitable for athletic sports — two dollars lowest price. Hey! what'd you say?" Mrs. Leigh was tugging frantically at his coat-tails.

"They are foot-warmers — say *foot warmers!*" she hissed, "and we'll be glad to get fifty cents for them."

"That's your trouble," retorted David sotto voce. "Must appeal to the imagination in this business; never tell the truth; can't spring the crowd that way. Pair of sneakers, wonderful for Marathon race — two dollars — do I hear two ten? Oh, two ten, two twenty-five! Does any man bid two twenty-five for the most remarkable pair of sneakers ever seen in this country?

Going, going — thank you, Hop — two twenty-five — do I hear another bid? Going, one, going two, going — opportunity of a life time — going three — gone! to Mr. Bunk Hopgood for the disgracefully low price of two dollars and twenty-five cents!" He looked reproachfully at his victim as he passed a pair of little number three woollen things to him.

The scene that followed was indescribable. The prices were scandalous, and the bidding furious. The fat woman who had refused to buy now found herself in possession of two embroidery aprons and three caps, having paid double the original sum asked for them. The auctioneer could not offer the things fast enough for the frantically greedy crowd. Women swarmed about him imploring him to put up this or that article upon which they desired to bid. The pandemonium was so great that Bunk found himself obliged to admit a policeman bent upon discovering the nature of the performance within. David caught sight of him beside the door just as some one passed him a basket of pink and blue eggs. Instantly with unerring aim, he threw one which crashed against his helmet. The room was filled with fragrance. The policeman joined in the roar of laughter at his expense.

"Most wonderful egg in the world!" shouted

David. "Laid by the flowers in Cuba! Can't be had in this country! Imported especially for this bazaar! If set beneath a feather boa in the spring they will hatch violets and carnations. One dollar each, going! going!" The eggs filled with scent were quickly disposed of.

The hour lengthened into two. No one thought of the passage of time. The auctioneer was getting hoarse, but his zeal and invention never flagged, nor the interest of the crowd.

"I believe that man could sell a dead cat for twenty-five dollars!" exclaimed some one.

"Sold himself yesterday, I hear," answered his companion.

"How?"

"Bought that swamp on the Southside. Expects to drain it and make another West Meadow deal. Can't do it! Ground's rotten marsh. No bottom!"

David was working like an inspired demon. Only once did his expression change. He was holding up a little card with the picture of the bambino on it. Below was tacked the leaves of a calendar.

"I have here three hundred and sixty-five days for sale, greatest bargain offered yet. Every one of them new, untarnished by a single evil deed or wicked thought. Can spend them as you

please — in the dust and smoke of the city's streets. You can divide 'em with your wife and children. Make 'em happy, or ——" he paused. The crowd became suddenly silent beneath the gentle gaze with which he covered them, like a lonely, homesick boy —"or," he began again softly, "you can spend them far from here where the grass springs green in the valleys, and the trees cast kind shadows, where the hills kneel in prayer, and the evening star keeps watch over dreaming meadows drenched with dew ——"

"Bid for me, Mrs. Buckhaulter," I whispered.

"Why, child, you can buy a prettier one for a quarter anywhere!" she protested.

"But not that one! Oh, I must have it!" I insisted.

"David, hand that thing to me, Joy wants it!" she commanded, reaching up and snatching it from his hand.

The auction went on for another half hour, until every article was sold.

"That's all!" called Mrs. Gillfilling.

There was a rush for the doors. But the auctioneer pounded furiously for attention.

"Ladies and gentlemen, there remains one more sale to be made. The fairest flower of Millidge. The last of the remarkably beautiful collection of — of ornaments in Mrs. Buckhaulter's booth. I

refer to one spinster, Mistress Joy Marr by name. Going — going to the highest ——"

He did not finish the sentence. Mrs. Buckhaulter struck his knees from behind with her two hands, causing him to make a flying leap into the laughing crowd below.

He faced about, bowing to me with mocking grace as he said in a croaking undertone:

"Not my fault, Miss Marr! If she'd given me time, I could have disposed of you also to an advantage — number of rich bachelors present!"

"You were engaged to sell what had not already been disposed of," I retorted coolly, lifting my chin and looking at him over the end of my nose, which I have already said turns up enough to snub Fate.

"And you have been?" he asked.

"Yes, I'm engaged," I answered, primping my mouth at him like a red bud with tightly closed petals.

For one moment I looked again into the anguished eyes of an outraged love. Then his face changed, like a red sky slowly darkening, upon which the lightning of unimaginable scorn played in a twisted smile. He turned swiftly and went over to Alice, who had watched the scene with insolent amusement.

I do not know which of us had the best of it,

nor which one of us suffered the most from our triumph. But I discovered then that there are more degrees in scorn than any other emotion. It is not an emotion. It is the concentrated gall of contempt. The scorn of a saint may be survived with impudence because a saint has no right to entertain it. And the spiteful scorn of a woman is not affective. But the scorn of a man for a woman whom he has loved, and who has robbed him of the sweet ideal of herself, surpasses the most awful judgment of heaven itself. Hatred is a compliment in comparison, because it rises above that, buries you with a damn, where hatred would slay you with the sword. I felt this in David as he passed out into the street with Alice. It was a kind of spiritual essence that filled the air about me. I stood suffocated, dazed with the horror of it as if I breathed the fumes of a deadly gas.

"Miss Joy, may I see you home? My car is outside."

I looked down into the narrow, white, pop-eyed face of Augustus Brown. I saw for the first time that his forelock was all the hair he had on top of his head, that he had trained a long wisp of it on the side to cover the baldness. I tittered hysterically at the flat yellow worm it made upon his pink scalp. But I accepted his escort cheer-

fully instead of going home in the Buckhaulters' car.

As we left the place I looked at him curiously, with a kind of fascinated horror. I wondered if this little, thin-legged, cricket-bodied politician was the man I was going to marry. If that was what three years of campaigning for a rich husband would come to! A vision arose before me of myself seated day after day, year after year, at the table facing him. I knew he was the kind of man who would read his morning paper at the breakfast table. I suspected that he made a gurgling fuss when he swallowed his coffee. I looked at him seated now beside me in the car, his head almost hidden in the collar of his coat, and the top of it barely reaching as high as my ears, and suddenly the conviction came over me that he snored in his sleep. I began to laugh. I swayed back and forth with horrible merriment as we glided swiftly between streams of foot passengers on the sidewalks, all carrying packages and wreaths of holly, some blowing shrilly upon tin trumpets, some laughing and talking, all shining like figures in a gay carnival beneath the electric lights.

He stared at me at first in amazement through his enormous black-rimmed glasses, then with a frisky agility of a rickety marionette he

joined in my merriment, thought he understood it.

"Jolly, isn't it, all this light and colour against the snow?"

"Oh, very jolly!" I gasped, struggling to compose myself.

"Makes us realize that there is no such thing as age, a scene like this. I feel like a boy myself, to-night!"

"Do you?" I snickered, lifting my muff and looking over it at him.

"Yes, I do. I feel like the youngest man in town seated here beside you — like a lad about to hang up his stocking!" he exclaimed, drawing close to me.

"Oh, don't!" I gasped.

"Don't what?" He reached forward to tuck the rug closer about us.

"Don't hang up your stocking."

"Why?"

"Because Santa Claus is a man, I've heard."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"He — he might mistake it for a little girl's hose."

He shot a glance up at me, suddenly sobered, like a small boy who has somehow got into his grandfather's wrinkled skin, and is wondering what the joke is. I felt him searching for it — the

meaning of my answer — distinctly thinking of his thin legs and refusing to believe I referred to them. However, they reminded him of something.

"Will you go with me to the New Year's ball?" he asked.

"Be delighted to go with you," I consented in a rage.

"Dance the first number with me?"

"Of course," I consented, so angry I could not keep the tears out of my eyes.

The car stopped.

"Good-night! And a merry Christmas!" he exclaimed, accompanying me to my door, and attempting to hold my hand.

If one could know, if they could even faintly imagine the thoughts in a girl's mind, that sometimes rise and settle like birds with silent wings above a bottomless marsh, they would not respect them more, but they would fear for themselves with a terror and horror that surpasses the trembling of the veriest coward that ever lived. The prettiest maiden, swaying like a fairy's wand upon the piano stool, with her slender fingers dreaming out a nocturne upon the keys while he gazed enraptured at her, may not be thinking about kissing him at all. She may be wondering if he could or would give her a Baby Grande in case she married him.

The Honourable Augustus Brown was in danger of his peace and happiness as he stood below me on the steps, looking up at me with ridiculous ardour.

He was saved from committing himself then and there only by the suspicion I entertained that he might drink his coffee out of the spoon with a sucking sound behind his morning paper, and that he was almost sure to snore in his sleep with his little perch mouth open, and that ludicrously thin moustache waxed and still turned up above it. I could not make up my mind to endure that for twenty years, I thought, snatching my fingers from his detaining grasp.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE New Year's ball was an annual affair which came off at the Terrace Hotel on the last night of December. The feature of it was a Virginia reel in which every elderly man and woman joined who could still bend supple knees and backs in quaint courtesies. It was the one occasion of the year when not only the society that is, appeared in iridescent splendour, but when the society that was tottered forth upon unsteady legs. This was composed of old men in shiny dress coats, and of impoverished dames with their old maid daughters wearing dowdy gowns, all hall-marked with their magnificent heirloom jewels, necklaces of coral roses shone upon gaunt bosoms, earbobs of pearls hung like fringe from withered ears, enormous brooches made of gems and set in gold as elaborately carved as Florentine picture frames fastened ancient bodices of brocade. This ball was in the nature of annual review for them, when they sat like a row of prim judges against the wall, and passed sentence upon the innumerable upstarts who had got in since their better days.

They recognized in the young beaux the sons of men who had been their tailors and grocerymen; in the most popular women, the wives and daughters of other men who had made their fortunes in a manner so reprehensible it could only be whispered to their neighbours in the next seat. Modern society everywhere is composed of these outrageously aspiring upstarts, the descendants of an ancestry which perspired in its shirt sleeves. Nothing in this world can approach the pride and contempt with which the vanquished old queens of a former court look down upon them.

There must have been nearly five hundred guests in the great hall, among them, all the people I knew. Father was seated with the Buckhaulters and the Leighs and the Gillfillings near the door, his magnificent old head lifted like a war horse, his hands clasped over the knob of his gold-headed cane. Francis stood alone some distance farther down, very slim, very elegant, but very angry. His thin face sharpened to a sting as he regarded Margaret Derry, who passed him with a nod, leaning upon Emmet Marshall's arm. She wore a white gown of chiffon over silk. This was the first time she had appeared since her husband's death without some lavender token of her widowhood. It was as if she had made up her mind to be a girl again.

And she succeeded. She had accomplished the whiteness of virginity, the smiling mystery of a maid in her small, round, freshly coloured face. Pursuing the impudence of my own fancy I wore a gown of gobelin blue, embroidered in gold. The neck was cut square, and the sleeves so long that they came down over my hands. This was the colour Alice had made famous in Millidge with her fairness. For years not another woman had dared it, being sure that she would invite a comparison which would not prove favourable to her. This was what I defied, that comparison. With my hair braided close to my head which is very small, with not a curl loosened to compliment or relieve the contour of my face. And while Alice invariably wore sapphires or pearls, I wore no ornaments. My shoulders and neck, round and full and perfectly moulded, proclaimed what Alice could never afford to proclaim, that I did not need them. She was growing thin. The hollows above her collarbone required concealment.

The music had begun when we entered, and the younger set were already dancing.

"You promised me this waltz," said Augustus, fidgeting beside me with rickety animation.

"But not with children! Wait till the dance really begins," I protested, anxious to defer as

long as possible the ordeal of appearing with him upon the floor.

We were joined presently by Margaret and Emmet.

"Joy, you bold girl, how dare you risk that gown? I thought Alice was the blue flame of Millidge!" she exclaimed laughing.

"Do you like it?" I asked, wondering a little at her cordiality.

"I like you in it better than Alice. If you'd worn blue oftener, she might not have worn it at all. And Mr. Marshall is entranced. He positively couldn't wait for some one to relieve him of my poor presence before he asked you for a dance. Or, was it two or three you wanted?" she exclaimed, turning to make a little mournful mouth at him.

"You always give me three, don't you, Joy?" he said as I offered my favour.

"Three the first year I was out, Emmet, two the second, one to-night," I laughed.

The circle about us widened as others joined it. The pleasant din of conversation increased above the music, which was becoming more insistent. The floor was now filled with gracefully swaying couples. Suddenly a silence like a breath passed over us. Every eye was riveted upon the door at the end of the room through which three

persons were entering. Charlie Archibald and David Brock with Alice between them. She wore a gown of carmine velvet, cut square at the neck and with long tight sleeves that came down over her hands. Her yellow hair was curled low about her face and held in place by a band of carmine velvet. Around her throat glittered a collar of rubies set in wide flat links of gold.

I watched her advance with astonishment and dismay.

"Is this the dawn approaching so soon?" said Emmet pretending to shade his eyes with his hands.

"No! that's the understudy of Mary Garden," retorted Margaret quickly.

We laughed as we recalled the fact that Mary Garden had appeared in an opera in Millidge some weeks earlier wearing a gown of exactly this shade, and with her hair curled low upon her temples in the same fashion.

There was a very old woman seated against the wall behind us, her face was withered like the parchment of a rose, her eyes rheumy and dim. She had palsy. Her head wagged incessantly. She tried to steady it, only to make it swing more violently from side to side as she fixed her eyes upon Alice.

"Mary," she quavered to her companion, "who

is that coming? In my day proper women didn't dress like that. She looks like a flaming sword borne between the devil and a saint!"

The simile was too apt. Margaret exchanged a glance with me primly, and moved aside to speak to Francis.

David certainly looked the part of satan. His face was flushed, his lips drawn to the tension sometimes seen when a man is in a delirium. His head bent, the black pupils of his eyes distended in a passionate gaze upon Alice, who was smiling archly as she replied to something he was saying. Charlie walked upon the other side, grave and pale. He gave the impression of not being present, of having escaped through the quiet skies of his singularly clear eyes into another place. There are many women and a few men who ascend when all about them seems to have descended. He appeared now in this bright confusion, in this din of music and tinkling voices, like a mysterious figure upon a distant horizon. It was an incredible achievement of which he was not himself aware.

Emmet bent his lips to my ear:

"Mrs. Archibald is about to be court-martialed!" he whispered.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Look at Mrs. Buckhaulter! Told you three years ago this would happen!"

I lifted my eyes in time to see Mrs. Buckhaulter return Charlie's bow, and then receive Alice's salutation with a stare which plainly denied her existence. Mrs. Leigh and Mrs. Gillfilling followed her example.

Alice stood a mere instant confused. Then, flushing rosier than her gown, she looked from one to the other of them. The three old dowagers neither moved nor changed expression. They became the ugly graven images of virtue, tilted back like fat idols against the wall. Father and the other men arose and bowed with alacrity, like old courtiers endeavouring to conceal a breach in fine manners. Alice moved on a little hurriedly to overtake her escort, still smiling, with her train licking the floor like a flame, her slim back bowed and her shoulders insolently lifted.

"It's over, sentence is passed!" Emmet whispered.

"Moral, never wear sunrise garments to a midnight function," I commented idly.

"No, never wear a wishbone in your hair after you are married!" he corrected.

Margaret was still engaged in a kind of amused altercation with Francis. Their courtship, if it was a courtship, had progressed in this manner from the beginning. It had consisted of a series of violent, or semi-violent quarrels, Margaret

being the offender, Francis the accuser. Her patience consisted in a kind of feminine amusement at his distraction.

Augustus was frisking here and there in the immediate neighbourhood, greeting his friends and ever and anon looking back over his shoulder at me, like a man who watches a young filly he does not trust to stand without his hand upon the reins. He was an artful lover who carried on a perpetual politician's courtship with the public and devoted the remainder of his time to the woman he was permitted to admire.

"Your little widower is becoming noticeably attentive," said Emmet, observing him.

"Don't speak of it," I answered, smiling ruefully. "He doesn't know at this moment whether he's going to marry me or Mrs. Franklin. He's sneaking down there to her now, aims to get to her, whisper an ancient compliment, and be back here before the next dance begins."

As if to fulfill my prophecy, he made a run, dodged nimbly out of sight behind the dancers, and reappeared bowing like a cricket, with his knees akimbo, before Mrs. Franklin, whose old painted face bobbed and smirked to him like an artificial rose beneath her diamond tiara.

Emmet and I exchanged a glance of amusement at the comedy they enacted all unconscious of

observation. It was brief. Augustus hurried back. Margaret had dismissed Francis. As they approached, Emmet whispered to me:

"Joy, I chose the last dance before the reel. Will you sit it out with me in the colonnade?"

"Yes," I consented, smiling back at him as Augustus drew me into the waltz.

There is nothing so monotonous as the life of polite society. The passionate zeal with which it is pursued is a phenomenon of artificial existence that cannot be explained. The dullest life lived in the remotest backwoods by men and women of merely rudimentary intelligence is full of the wildest adventures by comparison. For there Nature takes a hand. She sweeps a forest to the ground with a cyclone, she strikes a barn with lightning. She buries a poor man's flock of sheep in the snow, or she gets out of bed on the wrong side some winter morning, slaps a flask of whiskey into his hip pocket, takes an axe, goes to the nearest saw mill and commits a murder as naturally as a business man blows his smoking breath into the frosty air of the city's streets. Or she puts on a misty moonlit veil, takes a dew sprinkler, passes over hills and valleys a night in the early spring, lifts the grass from the frozen sod, changes the brown of furrowed fields to green, blows ten thousand flowers into bloom in a silence so sweet

and fragrant it becomes a joyful miracle before the astonished eyes of dumb, hymn-singing men and women. Or, if the "crops are laid by," and a calm threatens the community, she remembers her soul, falls upon her knees and starts a revival. She makes a great excitement upon the immeasurable heights of man. She drags him to the altar. She lifts him from it redeemed and vociferous. Religion becomes a sublime intoxication, to which the wildest excesses of a bacchanalian beast cannot be compared. No masked ball, however extravagant or splendid, can approach this ineffable reincarnation of souls, this spiritual upheaval of the highest from the lowest in a rural humanity. And it lasts longer, even until the labour and acquisitive animation of the harvesting begins. There is no sameness, no ennui where Nature controls the situation. She is the accomplished handmaiden of Almighty God, the fierce strumpet of a designing devil.

None of these things happen in polite society. Nothing really happens there. The life of it is a ritual of receptions, luncheons, teas, and balls, all planned according to custom. I do not know why we endure it. The monotony, the awful, hopeless sameness accounts for half the vice that results. It is Nature still struggling to release us, to create a diversion; Nature divested of her

rights, which consist no less of piety than they do of golden sheaves of blossoming fields and of love. She cannot even accomplish the necessary animation of destruction. A well-constructed skyscraper will break the back of a hefty cyclone. If a blaze starts in a garage, the fire department puts it out. If a man kills another, it is not a tragedy, but merely a common crime. There is no real religion, only charity with a grudging hand in its pocket. God cannot walk in a ballroom. He requires the sublimity of silence, the singing hills. There is nothing left but to be burned alive in our sins, or to be preserved in our tight-waisted virtues like useless jewels in a safety vault.

This New Year's ball did not differ from a hundred others, except that it proved to be the gaudy and appropriate obsequies of the fairest woman in Millidge, the occasion when Alice danced gayly and madly with David into that outer darkness which rims society everywhere and is the background of it. She was to be seen at all the public functions after this, but never again in certain houses which were quarantined against her as if she had been a disease. Her name became a whisper among women like Mrs Leigh and Mrs. Buckhaulter. Thus do the best women always dispose of the other kind. They

shroud them in silence deeper than the grave affords. It is by no means the mantle of charity, but a terrible sentence from which there is no appeal.

The hours passed and I passed through them like an orator hurrying to his peroration. I had partners enough and to spare for every dance. When a woman places herself upon the bargain counter, she does not need to say so — men know it. She becomes a pretty piece of merchandise which they consider but do not choose. I was aware now of the change in their manner to me, and like many other women in a similar position, I accepted what I could get, in lieu of what I wanted. I permitted Bunk Hopgood to call me "Jolly." This exchange of Jolly for Joy implied the significance of the situation, the marking down of my price, so to speak. I have vowed to tell the truth, and I set it down here. If any one of them had asked me to marry him I would have accepted him instantly. I had come to that.

The trouble is when a woman goes so far, that also is known. She acquires the glittering affirmative expression. Her eyes are two yeses beneath accenting brows. Men read the script of her face as if it were a poster, and become wary.

I was obliged to content myself with the

assurance from Chan Peters that I was a "good fellow." This was the way he had of putting me in my place, of removing me from dangerous proximity. I regretted that I had not accepted him in his Freshman year.

Bunk Hopgood went a step further.

"Jolly," he whispered as we waltzed together, "you are the prettiest girl in the room, and you certainly know how to give a fellow a good time. I've always said that!"

He pressed my arm closer, intimately.

"Bunk, you are a flirt!" I retorted.

"Not with you, Jolly. I'd never dare to flirt with you."

"Why?" I laughed.

" 'Fraid! Got a card up your sleeve. All the fellows know that," he snickered.

"What card?" I questioned.

"Not the queen of hearts for me, Jolly. Still you could, you might trump with it," he wagged his head knowingly.

I bore this speech without resentment. I could not afford it. Self-respect is somewhere above the commercial level in femininity. One often loses it without losing the rest. A chaste woman may destroy some ineffable part of herself. It is a violence she does to her immortality rather than to her mortality. The law which guards

and defends that is different, more binding. This was the statute I had broken. I was now one of those pretty licensed outlaws in society, who, being without love, barters for it. I was ready to exchange myself for a husband, for any husband who could maintain me in the state I desired.

At last Emmet came to claim the dance we were not to dance. This was the peroration I had waited for. As we left the sultry crowded ballroom I felt my heart leap like a sword from its scabbard. Every faculty of my mind hastened to the intrigue. This was not love, and it was not desire. It was the soul of an adventuress bent upon a certain achievement.

There was a long colonnade adjoining the ballroom. It was furnished with crimson hangings between mirrors on the walls, with tubs of enormous palms, and a row of small tables where men came to smoke. We chose a seat in a corner behind one of the red and white columns. Emmet drew the table nearer. The shadow of one of the palms fells over us.

"May I smoke?" he asked.

"Yes, and I will join you in the rite!" I said, extending my hand for a cigarette.

"What! do you indulge?" he exclaimed, offering me his case.

"I want to with you," I replied, placing the

cigarette between my lips and lifting it to light from the end of his.

We smiled at each other through the fragrant cloud. He was observing me curiously. I returned it archly, sidewise, as I drew back, opened my lips and sent blue rings curling mistily above my head. Then, as if he had made up his mind concerning a certain matter, he struck the bell on the table. A waiter appeared and he gave an order.

"We must have something to drink. Dancing is a thirsty business," he laughed.

The fellow returned presently with two tall glasses, slices of orange and cherries shining like gems in the amber liquor.

Emmet lifted his.

"Here's to love and the lips of a fair lady!" he said, regarding me quizzically over the top of his glass as he drank.

"I like the first toast you drank to me better, Emmet," I replied.

"I remember, to Mistress Joy Marr, may she remain what she is and never change! But you have changed, Joy," he added.

"How?"

"You have become the product of yourself," he answered enigmatically.

I was silent, barely tasting the wine as I revolved this reply in my mind.

We feel more than we know and we know more than the boldest of us dare put into words. Still there remains what we do not know, the guess of the future. As the liquor mounted in my veins, I fumbled in vain at the door of Fate. I knew that he did not, never had, really loved me, but I knew that he was still madly infatuated with me. The past weeks of his apparent indifference —what did they signify? I resolved not to question him about this. I was willing to forego any explanation if by this pocketing of my pride I might win him, become engaged to him and make good the boast to David at the bazaar. I was ready to play the card up my sleeve, any card, as I felt his impassioned gaze upon me. But the more intoxicated a man is with a woman, with merely her charm, the soberer his judgment becomes concerning her. He has a sixth sense hard to drug into matrimony.

I waited for him to speak. I did not know then that a man has no more need for words in a certain mood than a wild animal in a jungle. Language becomes at such a moment the betrayal of emotions older than speech. They commit him when the action does not. Therefore this strange elemental silence between us.

Suddenly he leaned forward, seized my hands, drew me to him and kissed me. He held me

roughly to his breast. I realized instantly the difference between love and passion. They are no kin. The latter is merely a kind of physical rage.

"Emmet," I sobbed, "you have no right! Release me!"

He laughed, brushed down the braids of my hair ruthlessly, as if so he would uncrown me, looked into my eyes, now wide with horror, and kissed me again.

"You are merely a broker in lovers, Joy. A victim has the right to take whatever advantage he can!" he retorted, almost thrusting me from him.

I sat, scarcely breathing, leaning against the column.

"Go!" I whispered, not trusting myself to look at him.

He arose, stepped quickly around the table, and left me.

I do not know how long I sat there dishevelled, horrified, understanding at last that this was his vengeance, not his love. The sight of my hair hanging in braids upon my shoulders aroused me. I rearranged it methodically, regarding myself in the mirror.

Age is not a matter of years but of moments. If certain hours were left out of life, we should never grow old. I beheld the image of a stranger

in the glass — the white pinched features of a woman who had suffered something unworthily, whose innocence was a sort of guilt, whose beauty was a shame. I wondered what I should do. I could no more have returned to the ballroom than if I had been stripped naked. I felt that I had suddenly lost some decent concealment, as if every man and every woman would recognize me, the secret woman, heretofore veiled. If we really believed in the Eye of Omniscience we could not bear it. We should die of shame. We do not believe it, and live on brazenly.

I heard footsteps approaching and drew back farther behind the sheltering palm. David and Alice passed, leaning the one upon the other. I saw, rather than heard, David entreating her; saw her withhold rather than refuse what he asked. They paced the length of the colonnade, then slowly returned to the ballroom. Silence again, but with what a difference. Rage is the only effective covering for a deeply offended woman. Virtue cannot accomplish so much. It is too transparent. It confuses her. I felt the concealment of this dreadful garment now. I ceased to think of Emmet, of his horrible kisses. I thought only of Alice. I could have strangled her. My temples throbbed, my hands trembled. Tears filled my eyes.

A clock began to strike somewhere below. A hundred bells gave tongue. Whistles blew. The town was in an uproar. The old year was passing. The music in the ballroom changed to a livelier tune. The reel had begun. Then suddenly I saw Charlie Archibald coming. Not the same calm figure I was accustomed to see, but a man blazing with strange fury. He walked hurriedly, looking from side to side, like a savage searching for his enemy. I knew that he was seeking for David and Alice, and I knew by the drawn sword expression of his face that they had escaped death by an accident, that if he had seen them as I had seen them nothing could have saved them. This was one of those incidents of fashionable entertainments, common enough, which never get into the society columns of the daily papers. But they are founded upon that secret interest which keeps the thing going.

Charlie sped, rather than walked, the length of the colonnade, flung open a door at the end which gave upon a balcony, went out, and then returned, moving more slowly, like a man confused, but still convinced.

We are queer creatures, moved by motives as conflicting as the web of destiny. So do we spin it, very fine, with many a thread in and out, which cannot be ravelled, only tangled.

As I watched this man approach, bent upon doing the very thing I most desired, I resolved to intercept him, to cover the retreat of Alice, to give it the appearance of innocence. I do not know if I was moved by the desire to protect her or to shield David. I was simply changed, and acted accordingly.

"Charlie!" I called.

He paused, looked about him, astonished.

I parted the leaves of the palms, poked my head through, smiling.

"Are you looking for Alice or for a burglar?" I asked.

"Yes!" he answered hoarsely coming across and seating himself beside me.

"Which, Alice or the burglar?" I insisted laughing.

He did not reply, only stared at me, breathing deeply, lips compressed.

"She and David have just gone. You missed them by less than a moment. We were having some refreshments here," I explained easily.

I do not know if dissimulation is the first or second nature of a woman, but it is one of her natures. I do not remember ever to have had the least difficulty in telling a lie better than I could tell the truth. It was a kind of artificial veracity with which I was gifted.

He looked at the table, then back at me.

"There — there are only two glasses here," he contradicted.

"I have a headache. I did not take anything."

Slowly his expression changed to one of infinite relief. But he remained silent, as if he feared to trust himself to speak. He knew that I knew what was passing in his mind. And I knew that he was grateful without entirely believing me.

"The reel is over. We have missed it. Shall I take you back to the Honourable Augustus? He was looking for you frantically when I came out here," he said presently, smiling at me like a convalescent, still distraught with a recent intolerable agony.

"No, send him here. He's too old to keep late hours, and I must go home. This headache is becoming violent," I answered wearily, feeling the return of my own distress, now that the strain was over.

CHAPTER NINE

I SPENT the month of January in bed, with a slight intermittent fever, not seriously ill. I was enjoying very calmly one of those collapses common to women in society. It is called nervous prostration, malaria, any name to cover the real malady which is in fact the subnormal temperature of the spirit, brought on by inhaling too much social ether, and more often by the shock of some secret disappointment. Many a woman is obliged to take iron and strychnine, and submit to "alcohol rubs," who is suffering from the compound fracture of her pride, an affliction she cannot explain to the physician.

Still, one recovers in spite of the medicine.

I lay strangely peaceful, like a wounded man, withdrawn from the firing line beyond the din of trumpets and guns. After a campaign lasting over three years, it was a relief, this coma. I sank beneath the level of pain, that agony of hope deferred. I did not think of Emmet at all. He was a symptom of my disorder which had passed forever. David was a phantom far removed. Alice became a spectre, no longer immediate or

malignant. She called every day, or sent some token of her singular regard, but I was mercifully spared the sight of her. The world in which I had moved ceased to be. No echo of it reached the quiet, warm, darkened room in which I lay. The nurse fed me with a spoon. Father was alarmed, Francis was irritated, Mrs. Buckhaulter paid frequent visits, inspected me suspiciously, but asked no questions. Women sometimes know when to hold their tongues.

And they always knew when not to hold them. At the end of a month Mrs. Buckhaulter's patience was exhausted. One afternoon she came in popping her heels noisily upon the floor, scolding loudly to Molly who admitted her. The righteousness of my invalidism was stirred, offended. I lay frowning at her as she bent over the bed, her large eyes focussed upon me coolly beneath their wrinkled lids, her thick lips pursed authoritatively, her little nose pointed suspiciously, intelligently like a setter's, who is tired of setting, and is determined to flush something.

She seized one of my hands limply folded upon the counterpane, waggled it impatiently to and fro.

"Can't you use it?" she demanded sharply.

"I suppose so," I answered indifferently.

"Do it then!" she exclaimed, seating herself and signalling the nurse to leave us.

"Listen to me, Joy," she began. "There is no such thing as nervous prostration!"

"No?" I murmured looking at her indifferently.

"Certainly not! It's a kind of pusillanimous hysteria of the nervous system, brought on by mental cowardice. If there really was such a disease, all the poor and wretched people in the world would be in the hospitals. They don't give up because they cannot afford to surrender. A woman with a drunken husband that beats her, who works night and day to support her children, never has it. Nobody has it who cannot take a mean advantage of the situation. You've simply got hysterics. There's nothing the matter with you. The nurse tells me you have had no fever for ten days. If you do not rouse yourself, you'll never get up. I've known women to come down like this and keep their beds for twenty years, become sanctified 'shut ins,' afflicting their families and friends with a spurious resignation. I want you to get up from here, quit swallowing raw eggs and gruel. It's the diet of cowards with melodramatic stomachs. Dismiss that nurse, put on your clothes and eat bread and beefsteak like a respectable God-fearing woman!"

She sprang from her chair, waddled like an old duck to the windows, jerked the cords angrily and sent the shades flying to the top with a clack.

The room was flooded with light. She returned to the bed fuming.

"I've always said there is one incontestable argument in favour of this Christian Science: If you go on believing that you are ill, you'll develop a tallow complexion out of your imagination. You are as pale as a sick baby — and you are not teething!" she snapped.

"I'm tired," I whispered beginning to sob.

"We are all tired, and the weariest people in the world are those who do nothing," she retorted.

"I can't endure the thought of beginning all over again. It's so aimless, so useless, the life we live. Nothing comes of it," I wept, turning my face to the wall.

"That's it exactly! I knew all the time this was what ailed you. Well, you'll not begin where you left off. We never do. Things have progressed in Millidge like a house afire while you've been lying here sulking."

"How progressed?" I asked feeling the sting of anxiety for the first time in weeks.

"Get up and find out!" she retorted, fastening her furs beneath her double chin, and rising to take her departure.

"I'm asking some women to a bridge luncheon next week. I need you to make out the set. Don't fail me," she said, moving to the door.

"Couldn't you ask them to play dolls, or build block houses, or something else? I'm so tired of cards, of the foolish tension, of pretending not to mind when Mrs. Gillfilling reneges."

"See here, Joy," she answered, laughing in spite of herself, "you have been lying here destroying your illusions. It doesn't matter what we do. Comes to the same thing. It is the way we have of passing the time. You'd find playing dolls much more dangerous than playing bridge. Gives more opportunity for the exercise of talent, therefore more opportunity for jealousy and spite. That's why women give up dolls and play bridge. Can't name the cards after our friends, nor pretend that they are figures in the same comedy. You ought to thank your stars that Millidge society does not play dolls, just now, anyway!" she concluded darkly.

If we remain quietly in our graves long enough, we shall not need to be judged in the last day. We shall have slept off, recovered from our many transgressions, rise from our dust naïvely purified. They, those sins so ardently committed, will have passed out of mind. We shall be healed of them as of wounds suffered long ago. Nature accomplishes this in some measure occasionally even while we live. The worst man or woman who quits the business of wickedness, merely

quits, for a while, becomes strangely innocent of the past, as trees are innocent of last year's leaves. I remember once when father sprained his ankle and was obliged to remain at home for six weeks, suffering just enough pain to keep his mind occupied. He became a perfect Pharisee of virtuousness. He delivered stern sentences upon his own favourite iniquities to his visiting friends. He was as exacting and intolerant as a saint. It was not until he was able to hobble back downtown to the club and fall by the wayside, that he resumed the rôle of a charitable gentleman, the kind and indulgent father, walking softly and politely in the shadow of his natural shortcomings.

I had some such feeling of having passed out of the long darkness of myself as I began my convalescence. I had not lived for a month. I felt singularly guiltless. But one cannot live and remain so. Piety is a furlough, not an existence. The good get out of it artfully into conscious righteousness. That is the peculiar snare which awaits them. But they do transgress, even if it is in their prayers, even if it is their honest condemnation of others — which is the subtlest form of iniquity practised in this world.

My snare, the means by which I was lured back into the thick of things, was of another kind —

the one most suited to my talent — which, I believe, is dissimulation.

I was seated in the library, before the open fire. I wore a loose white frock of soft cashmere, with a Roman blanket drawn like a rainbow over my knees. My hair fell curling and abundant over my shoulders, held back from my face by a wide, bright green ribbon band, one end of which hung a long way down instead of being knotted into a bow.

I was expecting Alice, whom I had not seen since the night of the New Year's ball.

She came about three o'clock, entering softly, with the air of a person paying a visit to a ghost.

I do not know which of us was more surprised at the sight of the other. She was very thin, the bones of her face showing, no roundness, no softening of the lines. None of that concealment which flesh makes of the spirit within. She was so pale that the rouge upon her cheeks gave the impression of a hectic flush. The veins on her hands stood out like a blue web. There were circles beneath her eyes so dark that they seemed to fade the pupils to the shade of lightest gray.

"Why, Joy, darling, I thought you had been very ill!" she exclaimed, taking my face in her hands and kissing me with lips which burned my forehead

"I have been, not very ill, but comfortably indisposed," I smiled.

She stood back staring at me.

"Well, you look rested. I believe you have actually taken on a little flesh!" she exclaimed.

"I have. And I am feeling splendidly," I replied, laughing.

"I thought you were taken very ill at the New Year's ball," she went on, seating herself, still regarding me wonderingly.

"I was, but, you see, I have recovered," I replied with sweet animation.

"Charlie said he found you in the colonnade dreadfully upset," she continued vaguely.

"Not upset, just feverish. I had a little headache," I corrected.

"He — he said you told him you had been taking some refreshments there with David Brock and me," she went on slowly, with her eyes reading my face, which was a bland text written in an unknown tongue.

"Yes," I answered, understanding what was in her mind, perceiving that she had suffered the keenest anxiety for weeks. This accounted for her altered appearance. And my mere affirmation of a curious lie only increased it. I waited for her next question, being sure she would ask it.

"How long had you been there?" she asked after a pause.

"I do not remember, a good while," I answered coolly.

"Did you see — were you alone?" she stumbled over the words deeply confused.

"Except for you and Mr. Brock!" I returned withdrawing my gaze, really not able to endure the hypnotic anxiety of her face sharpening into the fiercest excitement.

I wondered if she would dare the next question the thing she really wished to know, if I had overheard the conversation between her and David.

She could not. It was a confession not to be risked. She would not go far enough even to accuse me of the lie she knew I had told.

When the silence between us had reached the agony of a sword thrust, I released her. It was like that: as if for one moment I held her suffocating in my grasp.

"What is the news? I've heard nothing for weeks," I began changing ground.

"The engagement of Margaret Derry and Emmet Marshall has been announced. They are to be married in the spring. Came as a surprise. We all thought Emmet was in love with you, Joy," she said.

"Never," I replied, "we were only good friends. I knew he was going to marry Margaret."

"Did he tell you?"

"Yes, long ago," I answered serenely.

We both felt the tension relax. For the next hour we gossiped together like boon companions. Yet with a difference.

Late one afternoon, as I stood in the garden, a little green and golden snake, with rings of red upon its body, wriggled from beneath the old rosebush, crawled toward me rapidly upon the ground, with its slender head lifted, licking out its black forked tongue at me inquisitively. It was a cowardly little thing. The moment I moved it turned and wriggled back into the shadows.

I had the same sensation about Alice now that I had then about the snake. She seemed to be crawling in this serpentine motion, the spirit of her licking out a forked, venomous tongue. Over and above the apparent speech between us she seemed to be asking:

"What made you ill? And if you have been ill, why do you look so outrageously well, so serenely refreshed? Did you hear what David said to me? What I replied? What are you going to do about it? What is the game? Are you never going to show your hand? Will you

keep me in this suspense forever? I cannot bear it!"

At this point, when we were really discussing the possibility of Mabel Leigh's engagement to Chan Peters, she sprang to her feet, stood before the fire plucking nervously at the ruffs in the sleeves of her frock, looking down at me desperately. Then she remembered to repeat a compliment some one had paid me.

"He said you were the only beautiful woman he had ever seen who achieved beauty from year to year, like a rose blooming finer with each added season. Pretty speech, wasn't it?" She offered me this, as if she begged at some secret door for admission.

"Very; who said that?" I returned pleasantly.

"Oh, I must not tell you, dear. Make you vain. And you've never been vain. With all your loveliness, you are the most natural, the least self-conscious woman in Millidge. And he was right. You are startlingly beautiful. It's the mystery of your presence, I believe, more than the fairness of your features." She bent, caught my face in her hands, and kissed me.

"You do love me, don't you?" she pleaded.

"Of course," I answered dryly, withdrawing.

She sighed, stood up with her hands behind her.

"Life is such a bore, Joy. One must do some-

thing, anything to pass the time. One must be always looking for an interest, an excitement, anything to keep from realizing the uselessness of it all. Nothing really to do, nothing to achieve. Sometimes I envy, positively envy, those poor wretches who must work so hard, who never have a moment to think, who are blessed with the terrible necessity of earning their bread or perishing. Why, oh, why are we always trying to relieve them, to help them into this horrid independence of Nature which is nothing but a curse!"

"It's funny to hear you philosophize upon social economics, Alice," I laughed.

I knew that she was offering a defence of herself, that she was pleading with me to accept a certain explanation of her outrageous conduct, and I deliberately refused to do it.

She began to move restlessly about the room, pulling on her gloves as she did so. She paused before a bowl of roses on the table.

"Beautiful! Who sent them, or is that a secret?" she asked, and smiled back at me.

"Oh, no; Mr. Brown sent them," I answered indifferently.

"They say he will be the next Governor," she suggested with a laugh.

"He may be the next Coroner for all I care," I retorted with real impatience.

A few minutes later she took her leave with effusive affection.

I did not see her again for several months. I spent the remainder of the winter with the Buckhaulters in Florida.

When we returned to town in the spring Alice Archibald had accomplished one of those denouements common in society and in the domestic economy of bees. She had swarmed, so to speak. Forced out of the circle where she was accustomed to move, she had withdrawn and formed a new colony, taking with her certain social derelicts, among them David Brock and a few others. She and Charlie and even David continued to appear at the larger affairs when the ravelled edges of society always show. But they had really migrated and colonized and had their amusements apart with impish gayety, the scandal of which composed the whispered news of polite society. I was the only one of her old friends who kept up relations with Alice. We exchanged visits, impelled by the same motive. She knew that I was still in love with David, and I knew that he was still attentive to her. It was the horrid hypnotic bond of treachery and betrayal which held us, bound like two forces with drawn swords. I met David occasionally, sometimes at a dance, sometimes upon the crowded streets, a

savage figure always, more and more repellent in his manner to me, as if he enjoyed a certain contempt for me which amounted to anger — an anger that it was impossible for me to overcome, though he must have known I was willing enough. But this very willingness was his continued accusation against me.

Once the wall crumbled between us, and we beheld each other sadly, face to face. This was during another cotillion given by Mrs. Franklin, where for a moment I was his partner in the dance.

"David," I whispered, my head against his breast, "David dear, do stop it!"

I felt him tremble, saw him flush.

"Stop what?" he laughed, harshly.

"Stop everything you are doing. You are ruining yourself. It hurts me!"

"A man can't stop having typhoid fever, Joy!" he answered soberly.

"But ——" I began.

"Hush!" he commanded, swinging me furiously through the last measure of the dance.

A widow has one advantage which she does not appreciate. She knows that her husband is dead. The maid forsaken by her lover has no such consolation. I beheld in the dark eyes of David, then, my love imprisoned by another. If only he had been dead, and so, immeasurably

beyond her reach, I could have rejoiced. I could have shed tears of relief and happiness.

I do not now recall having but one source of consolation at that time. This was Charlie Archibald. From the hour when we sat together in the colonnade at the New Year's ball, we seemed to walk hand in hand even when far apart, nearly always silent; and always cognizant of what was going on, of every whisper behind lifted fans. We became two sextons, sadly appointed, to cover, to bury, what Alice achieved. A glance exchanged across a crowded room united us, drew us together with a common purpose. We found comfort in each other. We had rendezvous in out-of-the-way corners where we met during every dance, to smoke, to carry on a little aimless conversation. It was like the ghost of love, too pale for passion — this relation growing between us, gently binding — like shadows that drift along the path of life, lifting, falling, mingling according to a destiny we could not control.

The year wore on, with its everlasting round of amusements, diversions, grown stale with repetition. I was infinitely wearied of it all, yet heartily resolved to see the thing through. I shared with Millidge the conviction that the relation between Alice and David could not last. The town was rife with rumours about David's finan-

cial condition. More than once we heard of his losses. The tract of land he had purchased on the other side of Millidge had already proved an unfortunate investment. He spent enormous sums in the effort to drain it, without success. He neglected his business, and his dissipation was more and more apparent. No one could foretell the issue. But all were sure of impending tragedy. He and Alice alone seemed recklessly indifferent to the situation.

Meanwhile I had acquired a new and curious position in society. I was very far from being the belle that I had been, but I was the acknowledged beauty not only of Millidge — my fame had gone abroad. My photograph had appeared during the summer of that year in a Northern magazine, having printed beneath it: "Miss Mary Joy Marr, the most Beautiful Woman in the South." After that, no occasion was complete without me. I was in demand by ambitious hostesses — a sort of decoration they desired to show along with the other decorations. Millidge was proud of the distinction of having produced the "most beautiful, Southern woman," and hastened to claim it — would have indignantly denied the truth that there was several thousand others in the state equally beautiful.

Besides, with the decline of my popularity with

men, my popularity with women increased. They are never jealous of mere beauty in another woman. That which they resent and suspect is charm, attractiveness to man, which many a beautiful woman never exercises. In spite of myself, I had risen from the bargain counter and had become a sort of souvenir, a trophy to be cherished — by women.

The fact is that I had acquired something which enhanced my fairness. If you do not submit to the inevitable, if you refuse to suffer defeat when you are defeated, it becomes a power which exalts the spirit, and lifts the countenance, imparts a calm which is finer in effect than genuine animation. I had accomplished this expression by refusing to permit misfortune to interfere with my circulation, or my nerve centres. I retained my complexion, and a serenely unwrinkled brow. I worked out serenity as if it had been a pathological problem. I could not overcome the odds now opposed to me, but I refused to suffer them. This was not a virtue, but a quality of courage with which I was endowed. The result was as glorifying as if I was really entitled to the ineffable effulgence of a certain high look.

But a professional beauty must maintain her fame without regard to cost. She has no conscience about that. Her conscience is overruled

by another ambition — the desire to preserve her fame for beauty. I studied not the fashions, but the art of adopting them to my own needs, a far more difficult and expensive business. I required more and handsomer gowns. I was spending now three or four times as much upon my wardrobe as when I was a débutante. It is impossible to say how much longer Francis might have endured my outrageous extravagances if I had not finally passed all bounds.

This was a gown imported for me from Paris by Madame Prince, the fashionable modiste of Millidge. It was a sort of Hallowe'en interpretation which I wore to the Hallowe'en dance given that year at the Country Club. It was a misty thing, the colour green is when reflected in a moonlit pool combined with the deep yellow of tiger lilies, weird, ragged, such a garment as vagabond fairies might wear when they dance in the dim starlight; no seams, no hems, no bodice, no skirt, merely a green and golden blossom, held together with rhinestones that shone like drops of dew, fastened on my shoulders with little flat yellow butterflies.

This was the last ball I ever attended in Millidge. Shortly after that I returned to Nature, I became merely the human herb in my garden. That night I wore this gown which was such a garment

as Nature might have made for me if I had grown and blossomed above the green sod. We accomplish prophecies without knowing it sometimes.

That Hallowe'en ball is still remembered in Millidge as the night when Joy Marr wore her fairy godmother's dancing togs. For the last time, although I was far from suspecting this, I was the sensation, the mysterious heroine of the occasion, which was a very gay one.

As I danced the narrow slashed green widths flew back like long corn blades blown in the wind, the pumpkin yellow sheath beneath divided as if every moment I might dance through it bare-legged. Yet beneath the ragged calyx of green, beneath the yellow sheath, there still showed fold upon fold of thinest gauze changing from white to deepest pink. The audacity of the thing was its persistent modesty in spite of the suggestion it gave of me so near the surface.

The effect of the whole was enhanced by my seriousness and silence. I merely danced with a grace and abandon I had never felt before. I scarcely spoke during the evening. It was as if I wore a mask, as if I had been a stranger from another planet. I avoided Alice, whom I felt watching me, sometimes seeking an opportunity to speak to me. I refused to see Emmet and his wife. For once I failed to keep the understood

tryst with Charlie Archibald. This was because I was in no need of companionship. I had ascended into a kind of gay silence. I had accomplished an incantation. I saw Charlie return to the ballroom, stare at me as if he also was mystified. I had not seen David during the entire evening. This was the first time in years that he had not appeared in Alice's train. I wondered vaguely what that meant.

Some time after midnight I slipped out and was making my way to the dressing-room, following in the wake of the Buckhaulters, with whom I had come early in the evening.

There was a mirror hanging in the shadows upon the wall at the end of the hall which led to the staircase. Before ascending, I paused before it, regarding the strange image of myself reflected there. I was considering with an artist's eye if it had been right to draw all the curling mass of my hair so completely back from my face, if after all this had not been too bold, had not a little denied the mystery of my gown. Slowly, as I gazed, the reflection of another image appeared beside my own. I looked into the eyes of David Brock. If I had seen a ghost I could not have been more startled. His face, always flushed, was now very pale, drawn as if he regarded me from his grave accusingly.

"David!" I whispered, starting back and turning about, expecting to see him standing behind me. The passage was empty. I sat down upon the lowest step of the stairs, buried my face in my hands. I recalled the night long ago at the début ball when I had seen him mirrored then in the glass above the Buckhaulters' table. But with what a difference. Then he was Cuth-Ullin, a vivid stranger, whom we called "the Brigand." Now he might have been the pallid ghost of Fingal's blind son, staring at me with vacant eyes, yet filled with the nameless horror of blindness and despair.

"Joy! Joy! Hurry dear! we are waiting!" called Mrs. Buckhaulter from the door of the dressing-room above.

Half an hour later, when they set me down at my own door, I was still in a trance. I ascended the steps like one who walks in her sleep.

It was not until I had entered and bolted the door that I came to myself enough to wonder why the lights in the library were still turned on at this hour. I went in to turn the switch before going to my room.

I beheld Francis, standing with his back to the fire.

"Why, Francis," I exclaimed, "what are you doing up so late?"

"Slowly, as I gazed, the reflection of another image appeared beside my own"

"Waiting for you," he answered grimly, without looking at me.

I stood silent, wondering at this attention, knowing that it boded nothing pleasant. I saw now that he held a paper in his hand, a curious, white, folded, unromantic looking paper.

He offered it to me.

"What is this?" I asked, still staring at him.

"Read it and see!" he said sternly.

I opened the thing and saw that it was Madame Prince's last bill. It contained two items:

"One Gown	$300
Two Cables	20
Total	$320

Beneath, written in Madame's own cramped hand was:

"Please remit at your earliest convenience."

I was really astonished at the cost of the gown. I folded the bill and refolded it nervously. I felt, not conscience stricken, but anxious to get through what I knew was to be a disagreeable scene.

"Is that the thing for which I am to pay $320?" Francis demanded, looking me up and down in cool disdain.

"This is the gown, yes. I had no idea it would cost so much," I admitted.

"And have you the least notion of how you look in it?" he exclaimed with sudden fury.

"Like — like the Spirit of Hallowe'en!" I defended.

"Then the Spirit of Hallowe'en looks like ——" he paused, being my brother he could not afford to finish the sentence. But his eyes shouted the remainder of it.

I looked down at myself, at the green draperies, at the yellow gauze showing between. I moved my foot, disclosing the white veiling beneath. I stared at the emerald toe of my slippers with the rhinestone buckles, shining like dew. Then I looked at Francis, livid with rage, his lip curled, his eyes scornfully narrowed. He was not a man to be moved by tears. I seated myself calmly and waited. I felt that matters were even between us after that speech whatever the gown had cost.

"Why didn't you marry Emmet Marshall?" he sneered.

"Why didn't you marry Margaret?" I retorted, laughing impudently.

"You know very well!" he answered.

"Yes, because she preferred Emmet; that answers both questions."

"It also makes an end of the bargain between us," he went on. "For four years I have paid

your disgracefully extravagant bills. You know why. I expected you to marry. Why haven't you married somebody?"

I was silent.

"That fool Brock, for example? You could have."

I refused to answer.

"Why didn't you take one of those boys, Hopgood or Peters or Redding? You let Redding leave here, when you know you could have married him." He seized the poker, rammed it into the grate and stirred the coals angrily, as if he would have preferred to use it on me.

"And, now, why don't you marry that damned little widower, Brown? Ought to be thankful that he still wants you — a girl that has passed from hand to hand the way you have!"

"Because I don't want to marry a damned little widower, nor any of your damned sex!" I answered suddenly beside myself, and, rising, I made my way to the door.

"Wait!" he commanded. "Do as you please, or as you can now, about marrying. But I've paid your last bill. If you ever order another gown from this Madame Prince you may pay for it yourself! From now on you may make your own clothes. You may do that much that is useful. I will never pay for another made gar-

ment. Save yourself the humiliation of having me notify Madame Prince by not risking another order from her. Do you understand?"

"Yes," I answered. "I do understand. You are still in love with Margaret and you are taking your spite out on me."

"And you are still in love with that fool Brock, whom your friend Alice has held in leash like a lapdog for three years. Well, that is over at any rate. You and Alice have both lost him."

"What do you mean?" I whispered, with lips suddenly dry.

"Oh, it'll come out soon enough!" he retorted, thrusting me aside roughly and passing through the door upstairs to his room.

CHAPTER TEN

THE following day was one of such suspense as I can never forget. The heart of a woman may be far more faithful than she is. I could think of nothing but David. I recalled that he had not been with Alice and Charlie the night before, that he had not been in the ballroom at all, that he had passed like a vision across the mirror in the hall, and disappeared like a vision. I remembered now what I scarcely noticed at the time — that he wore his great coat with the collar turned up, the brim of his slouch hat pulled over his eyes, as if he had just come in, or was on his way out. I thought again of his pallor, of the leanness of his face, of the cavernous blackness of his eyes made larger by the dark circles beneath.

More than a year had gone by since he had called me over the 'phone, yet every time the bell of it rang, I lifted the receiver tremblingly to my ear, expecting to hear his voice, hoping to hear it. Once, as I was arranging some magazines on the library table the bell rang almost beneath my hand. I started violently. It was Alice.

I thought her voice sounded strangely low, not like the cool, tinkling tones I knew so well. She just wanted to tell me how lovely I looked the night before, she said. The Hallowe'en gown was wonderful. Where had I gotten it? Did I dream it? She thought it looked like a thing that had been dreamed, not made. I thanked her.. I said I was glad she liked it, and so forth and so on. Then we waited each for the other to speak,, to break the suspense we both felt.

"Have you heard anything, Joy?" she asked breaking the intolerable silence.

"No; you sound mysterious, Alice! Is anything unusual going on?" I returned.

"Oh, no! Nothing. It's a wretched day,, isn't it? Good-bye!"

I hung up the trumpet and sat pondering the curious change in her tones. I knew that she had called to find out something which she either feared or anticipated.

Later, when the 'phone rang again, I rushed to it frantically, sure that I should hear what it was, the something that hung like a gloom, like a part of the dreariness of the day, over me.. This time it was father calling to say that he would not be home to lunch, that he was unavoidably detained. His voice was tense, like the tones of a man at the wheel in a storm who

had no time to parley. He hung up before I had time to frame a question. I called his office, determined to know. The clerk informed me that he was not in, that he and Colonel Buckhaulter had gone out to the old office of the West Meadow Land Company. This was strange! David had abandoned his office out there the previous year, and had taken handsomer ones in the Bank Building downtown. No, the clerk replied to my question, he did not know when they would return. Some trouble, he believed, connected with Mr. Brock. No, he did not know what the trouble was.

The day wore on. The rain increased, a steady downpour. The streets were deserted, as if every one was somewhere behind closed doors with this mystery. Only a heavily loaded dray passed now and then, the driver crouching upon the seat with his head sidewise against the blown torrents of rain, the slowly moving horses steaming in the drenched air.

When I could bear the suspense no longer, I put on my hat and raincoat, seized an umbrella, and started out to call on Mrs. Buckhaulter. I was beside myself with this nameless anxiety. I almost ran along the deserted street opposite the park. I resolved to ask a thousand questions, even to reveal the very secret of my heart. So

far pride had been my silence. I only knew what every one in Millidge knew of David's infatuation for Alice. But the rest I did not know, merely understood from a word or sentence overheard, from an occasional dark intimation from Francis, that David had been facing overwhelming disaster in his business for some time.

I found Mrs. Buckhaulter seated before the fire in her parlour knitting a white muffler. The ball of soft yarn rolled from her lap to the floor as I entered the room.

"Why, Joy, dear, I was just wishing some one would drop in, but not hoping it. The day is so dreary. Draw your chair near the fire."

I stooped to pick up the ball, restored it, only to see it roll down from her fat knees on the other side.

"Never mind, let it go," she protested as I rose to get it. "That ball thinks it's a lamb still. It wanders over this floor every afternoon," she laughed complacently, then looking at me sharply she added:

"You are excited, as if you'd been running to see a fire."

"I did hurry. The rain blew so I was afraid of getting wet," I admitted.

The sight of her calmly knitting affected me strangely. It was like a command to steady

myself. I found it impossible to frame the question that was knocking noisily in my breast. I sat watching her, listening to the rhythmic click of her needles, fascinated by the sight of her pudgy fingers casting the thread so skilfully.

"You must learn to knit, Joy," she said presently without looking up. "The sooner you do the sooner you will have the only harmless, natural remedy in the world for keeping your balance. We, none of us, are really sane, you know. We are keyed too high. Brains don't reach the end of our nerves. That's why they waggle so easily. Knitting is not a mental exercise, but the thread runs over the top of your needles as if they were your nerves, soothes them. Some women wait until they are past middle age before they learn this art of turning the heel of their nature comfortably. But they all come to it. I never have known a single woman to live to a really green old age who did not practise some little incantation like this with just her fingers. You can't solve your problems by crocheting an Afghan, but you can absorb them with the thread, weave them into the fabric, get them out of the mind, where the more you think about them, the larger they grow. I often say that if younger women took to knitting more they'd have less

need of headache medicines and narcotics.'" She dropped her needles, wound it again around her little fingers, elevated it upon her forefinger, and went on more rapidly, as if some secret excitement made the needles fly faster.

"All this new thought you hear so much about, amounts to the same thing. Just an occult form of knitting, and not nearly so safe, because it involves, enslaves the mind. Women can't stand that. Mind is a kind of bird they have in them, without rhyme or reason, acts backward or forward with equal agility. I'm opposed to the New Thought as they call it, on that account. Form of self-hypnotism — can't keep it up. Strains the nerves instead of relaxing 'em — I hear Alice has become a Yogi. Lies flat on her back three times a day, inhales while she counts four, exhales while she counts four. Does it thirty-six times. Says it enables her to get in unison with her astral shape!" she grunted contemptuously. "Sign she's reached the end of her rope. When a woman takes to Theosophy, and 'The Voice of the Silence,' and to deep breathing, she's either trying to hypnotize a bad conscience, or she's begging the question of living. She's avoiding some issue of the nervous system. You may always observe this, the woman who takes to mysticism wants a mental opiate."

She went on and on in this manner as the hour passed. I understood finally that it was the way she chose of insuring my silence, of keeping me from asking the questions she somehow knew I had come to ask.

Presently we both heard the high tenor voice of a child in the street. Mrs. Buckhaulter fidgeted. The shrill cry came nearer.

"All about the failure of the West Meadow Land Company! President David Brock attempts to take his life! Extra! Five o'clock *Gazette* just out! Latest news!"

I sprang from my chair, ran to the window. A little boy carrying a wallet stuffed with *Gazettes* came flying down the street. Doors were flung open, men and women hurried bareheaded in the rain to get the papers as he passed making little rolls of them and whirling them dextrously as far as he could across each lawn.

"Mercy on us!" exclaimed Mrs. Buckhaulter, "I had forgotten that little scandal-mongering newsboy. Don't go out, Joy! Some one would be sure to see you." She threw her knitting aside, arose from her chair, and caught me by the arm as I made for the door.

"Thomas," she called, opening it and speaking to the butler, "bring the paper in!"

He had it already. Mrs. Buckhaulter snatched

it from him, and walking back to the fire, she crammed it into the grate.

She seated herself and resumed her knitting.

"All an exaggeration!" she fumed.

"But," I cried wringing my hands. "What has happened? That boy, he said David had — had killed himself!"

"No, he didn't! Sit down, Joy, I told you you ought to learn how to knit. If you had something methodical to do now, it would ——"

"Oh, don't torture me!" I cried, sinking into my chair and covering my face with my hands.

"I tell you it is just a newspaper story. I know all about what has happened. David has failed in business. His affairs have been in bad shape for some time. It seems that Emmet Marshall bought those mortgages Marcellus turned over to the bank, and all the others he could get on David's investment here. David could not make the payments on them when they fell due. I don't know how it was — I have no head for these things! But I know Emmet foreclosed yesterday. David is ruined. But he'll be able to turn over enough securities to cancel his indebtedness. It's very unfortunate. Such a fine young man, ruined by the vanity of a wicked woman! I hope the time will come when the real criminal in these tragedies can be made to suffer

what she deserves!" She snapped her thread in the violence of her emotion.

"But David?" I exclaimed, lifting my face and staring at her wildly.

"Nothing the matter with David! He's probably soberer to-day than he's been for months. Marcellus says he looks like a man who has come out of a long delirium. He says he's more like the young fellow now who came to Millidge four years ago than he's been for an age. Marcellus always liked him."

"But you are not telling me all. I want to know what happened!" I persisted.

"I tell you nothing happened, except that he is ruined financially. His friends have been with him all day. Everything is settled. He's leaving Millidge at once, I believe. And that's the best thing he can do under the circumstances. We are all so thankful that it's no worse, that he'll be able to pay what he owes."

"Is he — is he ill?" I asked.

"No, he's all right now. His friends were anxious last night. Men are so foolish. It seems that when he did not appear at the ball where he was expected some one who knew the state of affairs became anxious. I believe it was Charlie Archibald. He could not find David at his rooms in the hotel. No one knew where he

was. The wildest rumours were afloat. It was reported that he had absconded, that he had shot himself. You know how things grow from mouth to mouth. Just after we returned home last night the 'phone rang. It was Charlie. He was out at the old West Meadow office. He said he had found David there — in a very bad condition — and he wanted Marcellus to come out. Said he'd be obliged to go back home, couldn't leave Alice.

"Marcellus was with him the remainder of the night. He says he doesn't know what David might have done if he'd stayed there alone all night. He was beside himself. You know he's been very dissipated these two years. He never once mentioned doing anything desperate. But nobody knows what a man might do unstrung the way he was. He did have a gun, Marcellus tells me. And he didn't want any one to stay with him. But he quieted down at last and dropped off to sleep. Your father went out early this morning to relieve Marcellus. Later Mr. Leigh and Mr. Gillfilling joined him, and Marcellus went back with the lawyers this afternoon. Just before you came in he telephoned me that everything had been arranged and that David had quite recovered from the shock; had devoted himself like a sensible man all day to the settling of his affairs.

"That's the whole story," she concluded. "I wouldn't read the account of it in the *Gazette*. Emmet owns the paper, and he's never been friendly to David."

When the worst has happened it leaves a silence behind it, it fills the mind with a strange conviction. Mrs. Buckhaulter had nothing more to say. It was as if she aided me thus in dressing a wound. We had tea. She hoped the weather would be better to-morrow. She left off knitting as if that had served its purpose. But when I was ready to go, she reached out her hand, drew me down and kissed me tenderly, pressed my face to hers. I realized then that she was weeping, felt the tears upon her cheek. My own eyes were dry.

"Women are poor creatures, dear," she whispered. "They challenge Fate with their hearts and fail. They sow laughter and gather tears. That is the harvest they make for themselves. You were mad not to have accepted David three years ago. All this would not have happened."

"But I could not marry a penniless adventurer," I replied calmly.

She gave me a look in which a faint humour was mixed with admiration and astonishment.

"Go on, Joy! You come perilously near digesting your sins like a man. Who said that? Some-

body. I am incapable of thinking a thing so near the wisdom of the devil," she laughed.

The rain had changed to a mist. The short winter day was drawing to a close. I entered the Park; purposing to walk there awhile before returning home. I took the path by the lake, thankful for the gathering gloom which concealed me, for the deserted place which lay shrouded in mist. I was thinking of David. I was experiencing a new torture at the thought of his preparing to leave Millidge without seeing me. I wondered how he could accomplish this monstrous cruelty. I thought of Alice. I knew that he had forgotten her also, that he had cast us both out in this hour when a man would have naturally turned to the faithful woman for comfort. That was it. Neither of us had been faithful. This was our punishment. This was the strength of man which arose superior to us. We were the worthless securities in the consignment he had made. That which caused me the keenest anguish was to be coupled with Alice in this terrible business. The distinction between us in his mind in this final adding of accounts was so small that we were a part of the same item.

The mist changed again to rain. I quickened my pace. I had made the entire circle of the lake and was now approaching the narrow end

of it nearest the lower gate. A monument that stood here loomed up before me glistening wet in the gray twilight. It was a ludicrous thing, out of all proportion to the little body of water from which it was supposed to have ascended: Two gigantic mermen, with their enormous tails flattened upon the ground and holding aloft upon their shoulders a great fluted shell. Their bearded faces, their empty eye sockets, the strained muscles of their necks and bodies, all showed hideously real. Suddenly, as I came opposite, I was startled to see a man standing between them beneath the sheltering shell, a blacker shadow in the midst of a world of shadows. I was half tempted to go back by the upper gate.

"Come on, Joy, not a brigand this time either!" came a voice from the shadow.

"David!" I exclaimed, running forward, thrusting myself into the narrow space beside him and lowering my umbrella.

"I took shelter here from the rain. You'd better hurry on. It's going to storm," he said with dull indifference.

"No!" I cried, laying my hands upon his shoulders and trying to look into his eyes. "No, David. I want to be here with you. Oh, the day has been terrible, dear. I can't bear it, the thought of your going away without a word. You

were coming, you were on your way to see me, surely?"

"No," he answered lifting my hands, gently, putting them from him.

I was awed by the awful simplicity of his presence, as if suddenly he had become one of the elements of silence, as if life in him had been stripped of the garments of speech, and had become a part of the oncoming night. He stood looking down at the spattering surface of the lake, and I stood staring at him not daring to touch him, feeling somchow that I had become a sacrilege.

"Remember the night I overtook you there on the bridge, years ago?" he began at last.

"Yes," I answered softly.

"I was a free man till that moment when I held you in my arms. This is the first day I've been a man since. I'm — I'm almost happy. A man ought always to own himself. Nothing else matters. I found that out to-day — not even if he hasn't a dollar in the world!"

"Where are you going, David?" I asked fearfully.

"Remember that other night at the Franklin cotillion when I told you about the time I lay buried in the mine?" he went on, with his face still turned from me.

"Yes. It was terrible. I have never forgotten it," I answered.

"But not so terrible as my life has been here. That was only two days in the dark. This has been years, in fouler air, in deeper darkness. I have suffered such hunger here, such thirst, such horror as I could not have dreamed possible then. It's been one long hell.

"Remember what I told you I thought of down there in the black, suffocating earth? How I refused to die that I might get out to find a woman to love? Queer how the devil will take advantage of a man's extremity to snare him, to foreordain another misery over and above the present agony!" He smiled grimly.

"Well, you know the rest. I thought I had found her. You were so fair. You were like the answer to a man's first prayer, as lovely as that, as sweet as that. How was I — how could any honest man know the mind, the nature you concealed like a rogue beneath your ineffable beauty?" He sighed, slowly turned his head and gazed at me, as if the sight gave him mortal pain.

"And the day we motored through the Valley, Joy, you wore a white veil upon your hat. It floated back in the wind as if you had wings above your head. I asked you again to marry me. I

knew then that I had succeeded with my investments, that I was a rich man."

"Why, oh, why didn't you tell me that!" I cried.

A peal of laughter loud, hoarse, derisive, smote my ears, caused me to draw back from him horrified.

"Still the rogue! My God! I can't blame myself!" His face was distorted with horrid mirth. "No man could understand what you are by merely seeing you, Joy. You are, now at this moment, I think, the most beautiful woman in the world. Your face, it is as innocent as a lily bending beneath baptismal water."

"Don't say such terrible things, David. I love you, dear!" I pleaded.

"No! you love yourself. You are a promoter. Joy, you have every qualification for that business. Your real estate is yourself. You'd sell to the highest bidder. You'd sacrifice love and think the trade was fair if a priest witnessed the contract before a marriage altar."

I knew he spoke the truth, that with my heart aching with love for him, I would not have married him, that I was no more willing to risk that now than I had been to take him penniless long ago. Bad women are not the only greedy women. They are not by any means the most greedy. And they

pay — all they have, all they are. They lose more than we do, their honour, their self-respect, the respect of society. We get all and lose nothing.

I conceded all this. I flamed a horrid illumination in my mind. Nevertheless I could not yield the dear wild, honest heart of this beggared man. I reached out my hand to him timidly.

"But you love me, David!" I sobbed, drawing a step nearer, my eyes slipping softly into his.

"No!" he exclaimed fiercely, thrusting me back roughly. "By God, I do not love you. It was what I thought you were, what you might have been, that I loved!"

"Still you will remember me! You will think of me!" I whispered.

"Not if I can help it, Joy. I've cancelled you! I want to forget you!"

"But you can't, dear. We neither of us can!"

"No," he answered turning from me. "You'll come to me in the evenings in every mist that falls, looking as you do now, treading the meadows between quiet hills. You'll wear stars in your hair. I'll see your reflection in little reed bordered brooks when the moon shines as I saw you in the mirror the other night at the Hallowe'en ball. I'll see you walking between the rustling blades of corn, green and golden, with your hair shining, with your face lifted like a rose, with your feet

pressing the deep furrows like the feet of a dream
I'll feel your hands upon my face in the dark. I'll
miss a thousand times the kisses from your lips
that I've never had — take what comfort you can
in this that I would, but cannot forget you!"

He started forth. I stood an instant now
believing that he had, that he could leave me so.
Then I ran out.

"David!" I cried after him, "you'll come back
— some time!"

He had disappeared in the blinding rain.

I retraced my steps, fell upon my knees between
the mermen, yielding to uncontrollable grief.

Neither of us had mentioned Alice. Yet as I
wept suddenly I thought of her, and with the
thought rage swept over me. I blamed her for
this misfortune. If she had not been what she
was, if she had not been the ever-present alter-
native, I perceived that David would never have
deserted me. I might have married him, not now,
but years ago when success first crowned his efforts.

I stood up trembling with grief suddenly
changed to fury. I felt that I must see Alice as
she must be in this hour which marked her defeat
no less than it did mine. I was already hurrying
across the park to the Archibald house. I re-
solved to accuse her of her crime against David
and me, to break with her then and forever.

The maid admitted me.

"Come up, Joy, darling," Alice called from the top of the stairs.

I ascended. She stood in the door of her bedroom looking like an enlarged humming-bird in a disordered nest, her yellow hair prettily dishevelled, her blue kimono open, disclosing a crimson petticoat, her face flushed with pleasant excitement. The bed and chairs were covered with a litter of gowns and hats and fine white lingerie. A trunk stood with the lid raised against the wall. The tray was upon the floor half filled with laces and veils.

"What are you doing out in this soaking rain, you foolish girl?" she cried, seizing me by the hands and drawing me across the threshold.

I looked about me astonished.

"Everything is in confusion," she apologized, lifting some things from a chair. "There, sit down. I'm packing, you see. We can talk while I finish. We are leaving for Florida to-night. I told Charlie that I must have a change. I'm so tired of this incessant round of entertainments. And he's tired, too. Charlie is such a dear. Didn't say a word against it when I proposed this trip. He needs it as much as I do, he says."

She was whisking back and forth, folding her clothes and laying them in the trunk.

"I hate society, Joy," she said, bending over the tray. "I'm going to give it up. So wearing; all for nothing. I don't know how I'd have got through these last months if it hadn't been for my deep breathings. Do you know anything about the 'Voice of the Silence,' dear?" she asked, straightening up and regarding me seriously.

"No," I answered dryly. "What is it?"

"It's the voice of your ever being. I've practised now till I can hear it — so soothing! Takes you out of your — your carnal body, unites with your astral shape," she sighed gently.

"What — what is your astral shape?" I stammered.

"Why, it's your spiritual body, dear. I never even suspected I had one until I began this rhythmic breathing. It's the greatest relief! You must become a Yogi, Joy, then you'll know all about it. I'll teach you when I come back. I haven't a doubt you have a perfectly darling little astral shape — blue!"

"Why blue?" I demanded.

"Oh, that's the highest, best kind to have. Some people struggle for years without getting it. But you must be careful about your aura, or you'll spoil everything," she warned.

"Aura?" I said, more and more mystified,

not by what she said, but by this calm radiant, sublimated Alice.

"Yes, dear, your aura is the envelope of your sublime being. I've become very sensitive to it. I'm positively unhappy if for a moment I'm thrown in contact with a person who has a black and yellow streaked aura! My spiritual essence is outraged at once. Just now when you came in, I felt some disturbance in your aura, a — a kind of darkness — not so bad as red, of course, for that is perfectly awful, but I felt that there was something disturbing the spiritual fluid in you. Guard against it, dear. If people only knew, they'd never permit themselves to become angry — or bitter, or anything disagreeable."

I had the sensation of one overcome by some spell, perfectly conscious, but incapable of action, of thoughtful speech.

Meanwhile Alice moved to the bed, took a handsome set of furs from it, smoothed the muff, held it up and considered it. The next moment she came to me, threw the long, narrow piece of seal over my shoulders and dropped the muff into my lap.

"There, you may have them. They are quite new, but I shall not need them in Florida. And you'll be too lovely for anything in them!"

If I had been astonished at her, I was now stil more amazed at myself, at the satisfaction, even delight, with which I received the gift. Five minutes later I bade her good-bye affectionately and left the house shuddering with horror at myself. I seemed to be purchasable by nature.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

ALICE and Charlie remained in Florida the whole winter. I had an occasional letter from Alice. She was practising deep breathing in the blossom scented air of the South. She had much to say about the "occult," as if this was a new recipe she had discovered for compounding a soul. She wrote at length about "metaphysics." She did not know that this is a science having to do with the anatomy of mind, because she did not have a mind, only an addled egg intelligence incapable of hatching an honest thought. She was as much absorbed in this effort to dissolve herself, as she had been in charity and good works the previous year. You will observe this about a certain class of shrewdly wicked women. They are not really shrewd — mere liars. They try every device save honesty and uprightness to escape self knowledge. They search for a moral disguise. They sanctify themselves with vague doctrines, and they never have the courage to look themselves in the face, what they really are, as men do. A man knows when he is going to the devil, and while he may

conceal the fact from others, he does not attempt to conceal it from himself. Alice wrote fervently about eliminating the evil of Nature, as if it was a psychic disorder to be removed by frequent doses of spiritual salts. Once, late in the winter, she wrote with a kind of holy enthusiasm of having made the acquaintance of a mystic, a wonderful man who was helping her to cultivate her astral shape. Soon after this she and Charlie came home, and she devoted herself to organizing a club of Yogi in Millidge. She had the missionary passion for soul culture. She was very well, oh, perfectly well, she said for the first time in her life. Health was harmony with the invisible. She had that. She was really greatly changed, wasted, her eyes unnaturally large and brilliant with nervous excitement. She dressed queerly, in gowns that she said were Grecian like those worn by vestal virgins. She said they left the body freer. There was no doubt about that. They did. They were merely rainbow coloured chemises bound beneath her bust with iridescent girdles. She hated hats and went about with a fillet in her hair when it was possible.

One day early in the spring I had been spending the afternoon with Mrs. Buckhaulter. When I came away she accompanied me a short distance, giving me some instructions about my garden.

As we stood talking at the corner of the street Alice passed in her electric. She was wearing a pale-blue garment, draped from her shoulders and drawn in beneath her bust with a lavender girdle, and she had a narrow white fillet on her head. She had been to a meeting of the Yogi.

Mrs. Buckhaulter hurriedly adjusted her spectacles and stared at her. Colours chosen on account of their spiritual significances are never becoming to a mortal.

"I have always said that woman's sense of clothes is founded upon her sense of morality," exclaimed the old lady. "If anything happens to that she'll show it in her dress. She'll become a distracted fool about what she wears!"

"You don't understand," I explained, laughing. "Blue is the shade of Alice's aura, and it's the highest grade aura to be had."

"It's the colour she chooses to veil her hypocrisy," she retorted. "Don't tell me! That woman will become so conscious of her soul presently that she'll be willing to go stark naked."

I was astonished at the shrewdness of her observation.

Alice and I kept up a sort of limited friendship. I think we each sought the other hoping to hear something of David. But his name was never mentioned between us. It was merely the silent

question ever present which neither of us could ask or answer. If David had descended into the solid earth he could not have disappeared more effectually than he had done since his departure from Millidge. However, Mrs. Buckhaulter's remark recalled the visit I had with Alice the day before. She reproached me gently and sadly about the low plane upon which I was living. She was sure I was capable of rising superior to the carnal body. She said she scarcely felt her own now at all, that so far as her feelings were concerned she was simply a spirit, that she had lost the vulgar sense of modesty which made people ashamed of their bodies. Hers, she felt, meant no more to her than a little candle she burned. The wick of it was her immortal spirit, and she did so long to be free. She wished it was possible for her to show how free she really was. But Charlie objected, she concluded with a sigh. Charlie was now her chief sorrow, the stone that hung dragging about the neck of her astral shape and retarding her ascension. He would have nothing to do with the occult. He scouted the "Voice of the Silence," and devoted himself sullenly to business, leaving Alice to go her way, but keeping an eye upon her astral activities enough to prevent her from showing a too flagrant disregard of the carnal proprieties.

It is difficult to interpret my own condition during this period. We sometimes serve a life sentence for our crime or our folly without appearing in a court of justice. I believe most of our life is taken up in "doing time" for our transgressions. It is not repentance, it is simply inevitable punishment, a sort of discipline no man nor any woman escapes. Wealth cannot bribe this justice, nor commute this sentence. I do not know if it is even shortened by "good behaviour." If you have done wrong you may evade the law of man, but you do pay. A good many of us die in this involuntary penitentiary of the soul, making a bluff of it on the outside, but rattling our ball and chain inside just the same.

I began to pay for the folly of nearly five years social dissipation immediately after David left Millidge. It came upon me inevitably, as if I had been working toward it from the first. In fact I had been. A misused opportunity kicks like an overloaded gun. I had lost my chance of happiness in this manner. There was nothing left for me to do but retire from the scene. The Hallowe'en ball was the last one I ever attended in Millidge. I withdrew from the social world there, closed my books and went out of that business, having failed in it. But I was bitterly discontented with the only existence now open to me,

that of keeping house, of devoting myself to nar
row economies, and to the comfort of father an
Francis. I was not by nature domestic. I mak
the assertion here boldly, sure of contradiction
but none the less sure of my contention — n
woman is by nature domestic. They do no
belong in their homes any more than birds belon
in the cages where they have been imprisoned
They are there for the same reason, caught an
put in and trained to service some thousands o
years ago by men who chose them singly for thi
purpose. The proof that they have never really
settled down willingly is that they have to thi
day no initiative about living in a house. The
have never invented a single thing necessary t
lighten the labour of the home. Every device
known in the modern establishment for comfor
or convenience was invented by a man. Women
have been merely trained to do what is to be done,
whichever way they are told to do it. They
are of all creatures in this world the wildest, the
least capable of exercising the genius of civiliza-
tion, because people in bondage never have made
the liberty of mind necessary to develop any kind
of genius. I do not know if men are to be praised
or blamed for this situation. But they have the ad-
vantage, not only in strength, they have made the
world what it is, written all the Scriptures, defined

all the virtues for their own convenience, even set the Lord himself up to be feared and served more particularly by women with their heads modestly covered, while they continue to hobnob opportunely with the easier devil. It has all been very shrewdly managed, and doubtless for the best. But I say we, the women, are not what we were made to be. We are merely the trained automatons of an order of things we did not invent.

This was the caged existence I was compelled now to enter through my own folly, not by my own choice. I became a woman in this sense for the first time after David went away, not so much because Francis refused to bear the expense necessary if I kept up appearances in society, but because I had no further interest in it. There was not a man in it now that I could consider accepting as a husband, or who would consider me. So I became a part of the furnishing of our home, which is the fate that awaits the average woman at last somewhere. She is the animated dust cloth of her establishment, the hostess of her family. Her interests are not in the larger affairs of the world. The world is a squint-eyed monster she is trained to shut out with her front door. She does not know when the whole country is trembling upon the verge of a financial panic because she is behind with her sewing. She does not care

who is elected president, nor whether tariff is revised upward or downward, because she is beside herself with the worries of spring cleaning.

No word can describe the irritation, the secret discontent with which I passed through the dull days of that first winter occupying my time with a thousand infinitesimal duties, thinking of David, watching each morning for the postman, always hoping to hear from him, never hearing.

As the spring came on I seized upon the only diversion possible with hysterical desperation. I became fiendishly active, tearing up carpets and changing the furniture in the house. Women move their furniture about because they cannot remove mountains, nor change the order of things by blowing their breath in the face of creation. It is the outward symptom of an everlasting inward unrest. The same thing that makes a canary hop all day long from his perch to his swing and back again, because the door of his cage is closed.

One instance of this first house revolution I record here, merely to indicate the cross purposes of life between a woman enduring the peonage of domesticity and the men in her family. Each works out for the other a comedy of errors, or tragedies so small that they take from the dignity

of tragedy and impart a certain ludicrous insignificance to their mutual unhappiness.

It was a blustering day in March. I wore a gingham frock, a long apron over it, a ruffled unbecoming dust cap on my head. And I was frowning. It depends upon the quality of the woman what indication resignation gives of the weather of her spirit. In me on this particular day it registered somewhere in the storm regions of domestic disturbance. I had been doing right a long time, and I do not say that doing right is bad for one's character, but it is depressing to the spirit, takes some of the happy vim out of living, makes one unhealthily good — or ill. Nature becomes one's foe, or one's neuralgia. I had reached the typhoon of the discontent known to all wretched women as the last day of house-cleaning week.

It was late in the afternoon. I walked from room to room considering the changes I had made. I was not on good terms with Molly and the man who helped with this business. No housewife ever is with her servants at such a time. Nevertheless, at the last moment I called them in, and had them to move the highboy in my room upstairs to Francis', and place it on the right hand side of the door. It was an ugly old thing with arms that held the mirror crooked outward like elbows.

I was tired of looking at it. And I did not care whether Francis wanted it or not.

I was almost satisfied with the changes I had made in Francis' room. Not a single piece remained where it had been. The massive mahogany bed that had occupied the same corner for thirty years now stood on the opposite side of the room. The wardrobe was before the fireplace, and the dresser was set between the windows. I wondered what father and Francis would say. They had been away all day. Francis, who was out of town on business, would get in on the midnight train. Father had telephoned he would be detained at his office till late in the evening. This meant that he was at the club.

I dismissed Molly and retired early, throbbing with weariness, oppressed with the thought that this might be the only kind of excitement I should ever have, this periodical upheaval of inanimate things. I thought perhaps after all I had better join the Woman's Club. This was an organization in Millidge, which took itself seriously and which harboured all the unattached females left over from their social careers, or who aspired from the first to make "something of themselves." Mrs. Buckhaulter had suggested that I might enjoy it. I told her I would think of it. As a matter of fact I was so profoundly feminine that

I revolted at the idea of "making something of myself." I began to weep softly in the dark at this horrible alternative against loneliness — of becoming well informed, of reading papers on Child Labour or the Sistine Madonna. I appealed to David. My mind went back to him timidly. I wondered if this was the kind of girl he could have trusted, this Joy Marr who wore plain frocks made by a sewing woman, and urged Molly day by day into a sort of anguished tidiness. If I had always lived in this manner, if I had never gone into society, not felt the acquisitiveness of that greedy atmosphere, would I have been willing to marry him, fortune or no fortune? Undoubtedly, yes! I understood for the first time clearly that it is this monotony, this bondage of little things in domesticity which drives the girl in average circumstances to accept any man who asks her hand in marriage. It is the way she has of lifting her scenes at least once in a lifetime.

At last I fell asleep. It was nearly midnight when I was aroused by the closing of the front door. I knew by the sneaking softness of his tread in the hall that it was father. His habit was to enter very quietly when he was late and retire without turning on his light.

I must have dozed, for presently I was startled by queer fumbling sounds in the next room, mixed

with sobs of uncontrollable grief. I raised myself upon one elbow and listened. The sobs mounted to a confused moan.

I sprang from the bed, turned on the light, slipped my arms into an old red kimono, and threw open the door which communicated with father's room.

At first I could see nothing, then in the darker shadows where his bed had stood I beheld father down upon his hands and knees, his hat cocked sidewise and far back upon his head. His heels were entangled with the rockers of the easy chair which was swaying back and forth as if in unholy mirth. The face he lifted to me was the most woeful I ever beheld. Tears streamed from his eyes, his mouth worked beneath his moustache, his white goatee bobbed up and down with his puckering chin.

"Father! What on earth is the matter?" I exclaimed in amazement.

"Joy, my shile, have you sheen anything of m' bed? Been lookin' for it 'n hour. Can't find her anywhere. Can't find er shingle damned thing in thish room," he quavered.

"There it is, father, straight in front of you," I said, pointing to the bed and beginning to laugh.

He started for it, still upon his all-fours, moving very slyly, swaying from side to side, as if he

was prepared to head it off. He stretched out one hand when he came within arm's reach, seized one of the mahogany posts as if it had been the leg of a wild animal, and held to it frantically, his face smoothing out into an expression of intense relief.

While this was going on I heard Francis come in and ascend the stairs. Now I heard him descending swiftly as if he was merely hitting the steps at random, half falling. The next moment he burst into the room. Blood streamed from between the fingers he held to his face. One eye was already swelling beneath a red whelp upon his forehead.

"Joy, what do you mean?" he finally shouted.

"What do you mean — I shay!" groaned father, looking up at him lugubriously from where he sat upon the floor with his arms about the bedpost, his head leaning against it.

"My shon bringin' my gray hairs in shorrow to the grave," he sobbed dolefully. "Always expected you'd do it, Franchis. Never had any confidench in y' outrageous professhon of virtue. Been in a midnight brawl, that's where you've been, shir. Get out of m' shight!" he commanded, permitting his head to sink upon his chest with the air of a befuddled saint overwhelmed with shame and grief.

Francis stared from one to the other of us, livid with rage, then he crossed the hall and went into the bathroom, where we kept the family medicines upon a shelf in the corner.

I followed him, weak with laughter, and filled with a vague guilt, like a child overtaken in a fault, but who does not know yet what the fault is.

I bent over the basin, helping Francis sponge his face.

"Joy," he demanded, turning up his swollen, blood-shotten eye at me, "what's that just inside the door of my room?"

"It's — it's the highboy," I answered struggling to restrain my mirth as I pressed the sponge into his eye. He leaped back, quivering with pain and rage, holding his wounded eye and glaring at me out of the other one.

"Have it taken out of there in the morning! Thought a man had struck me when I came in to-night."

"I will not!" I retorted.

"Do you dare to tell me ——"

"Yes," I interrupted. "I dare to tell you that I am the mistress of this house, and I'll put the sideboard in your room if I like."

I dropped the sponge and walked out, leaving him speechless with amazement.

This was the first time I had ever defied him.

And it was the beginning of the subjugation of Francis. I no longer had any reason for enduring his petty tyrannies, but he was forced now to endure mine. This was the penalty he paid for reducing me to the sphere of feminine usefulness.

. . . . . .

It was fortunate for him and for father and for Molly, who wore the whole winter the peeved expression of an ebony saint, that as the spring days widened in the sun I escaped into the old garden at the back of the house. Having accomplished such a revolution in the house as only an irritated woman can accomplish, I began with the same desperation to devote myself to working out certain reforms in the garden. A woman must devote herself to something. She craves a vocation, rather than a profession. If she has no husband, no children, no lover, she may become religious. She will make a vocation of the life to come. Piety is her remuneration for the life that is. She will live by faith upon the substance of things hoped for. Or she will get an affection for flowers, become the Mother Superior of these little children of the sod that never grow up, that never forsake her and wander away to bloom in some other woman's garden. To really love flowers, to attend them with faith-

fulness and tenderness is always a sign of loneliness or bereavement in a woman.

So, bereaved of David, and debarred by poverty from holding my position in Millidge society, this garden, rather than the house, finally became my convent. I came in time to know the flowers that bloomed there as other women know their prayers.

If the reader is annoyed by this break in the narrative, if he is impatient to know what really did happen in the end, let him consider how many breaks there are in the narrative of his own life, how many times the good God changes his scenes and gives him another chance by sending him upon the stage in a new part. Also, let him take heart. These adventures do not end with a horticultural anticlimax. In as short a space as possible I shall set down here as much as I can of that which is required two years to live, and only because it is important. When a woman incorporates a garden into her existence it affects her character even more than religion does. The culture of flowers is a creed, like any other, and not nearly so damaging as the average creed. It is really the shorter Catechism written in quaintly illumined type. The larger Catechism being the whole earth which has never been learned even by the wisest man.

This garden was two hundred feet wide by two hundred and fifty feet deep. The walls of it were a ragged boxwood hedge. The walk that divided it in the centre was bordered with thrift which bloomed as pale as the lips of a maiden that had never been kissed by a lover. At the end of the walk there was an old summer-house, the chapel, so to speak, covered with honeysuckle. Here seated upon a mouldy bench, that leaned against the green walls in times past, I had listened to lover's vows. I had come perilously near kissing and being kissed in that place by more than one man. We had been eavesdropped there by the violets, and concealed by the fragrant honeysuckle. No church in the world is so sadly sacred to a woman as such a place if she does not marry. If she does, for some reason, it loses its sanctity. But I had not married.

On either side of the walk there were beds in the shape of moons, quarter moons, and little pointed stars, with narrow paths between — as if the maker expected whoever walked there to be alone. All was overgrown and blurred by years of neglect. The roses stood up shanky and half dead, like the survivors of old families who have been reduced to indigence. Spirea bushes spread their bridal boughs far and wide over the hedge at the end of the garden. Two flowering

pear shrubs (erroneously called Japanese Quince) which stood upon either side of the summer-house like a thorn barricade, bloomed red in the spring as if they drew blossoming blood from the sod. There was a smoke-tree in the centre of a little star bed that harboured a mole among its roots. Two crêpe myrtles with slender white bolls that stood like ladies-in-waiting with a bench between them halfway down the walk. And there was a climbing cloth of gold rose that clung like a lover to the casement of the windows of my room. And everywhere there was a thousand little animals that lived as they could. When flowers are neglected they do not die, but they starve, bloom smaller year by year. And they migrate. Nobody knows how, but if jonquils and hyacinths and tulips are left long enough in the weeds and grass, they do take up their bulbs and walk over into the neighbouring bed and bloom the next season with the sweet-williams and ragged-robins. And the season after that the sweet-williams and ragged-robins in deep offence will have moved in among the lilies and Stars of Bethlehem.

Nothing could surpass the social confusion of flowers in this garden when I took refuge there from my own greater confusion. It had become an outrageous democracy of weeds and blossoms.

Many years before when father's mother designed and planted it, there had been order and proper distinction between masses and classes. The zinnias lived in one moon, the poppies in the other. There was a star filled with nothing but primroses, and another with heart's-ease. The lilies bloomed like candles in a row within the hedge, and the verbenas did not cover the face of the earth like a patchwork quilt in the sun, nor did the four o'clocks wag their blooms like pilgrims in the middle of the walks. Mother, it seems from father's account, made a strenuous effort to keep down the proletariat larkspur and marigolds when she first became mistress of the place. But after her death there was no longer any question of class distinction. the larkspurs fought and obtained liens upon the best soil. They massed side by side with the fat peonies and bloomed like rainbows as they pleased. Socialism reigned over the whole place after the distracted manner of socialism, I set it down here humbly, having little knowledge of the wisdom of governments — that socialism is a divine theory of life, impractical in a world not ready to be divine. If any honest man desires to know what would actually happen to society under a socialistic form of civilization, let him spend a year trying to bring order out of confusion in a flower garden

that has governed itself for twenty years, without reference to the law and order of gardens, but merely upon that theory of nature which permits everything to live and flourish that does live and that wants to flourish. The best things do not die. They starve, lose cast. The worst things do not grow better, but stronger. I can never forget the anæmic hyacinths, with thin stems that I found among the hardy blue-bottles, nor the dewdrops lifting their little pauper cups like beggars in the luxuriant grass.

I did not really care for the flowers at first. I was still obsessed with the feminine hysteria for order and cleanliness. I spent days weeding the beds, clearing the walks, always leaving the flowers where they stood. It was too late that year to replace them where they belonged, even if I had known. This proved fortunate because as they stood the whole garden was a mass of bloom until frost.

CHAPTER TWELVE

I WILL not say that I was contented as the year wore on, widening and shortening its days, making its seasons for the first time in my experience not according to social functions, but by the time of flowers to bloom. But I was less discontented. I had not accomplished Alice's harmony with the invisible, but I was drifting gently into an easy place with the visible. We do take on the meaning, even the colour of things about us. This is why women in society are dangerous, and never quite good. They live in an artificial light. And it also explains why women who live always indoors, however, dutifully become drab in nature, and homely in expression. They miss the cardinal colours of the sun, invisible currents of the earth ever ascending. They are the mushrooms of domesticity, raised even by prayers in a dark place.

I escaped both fates in the garden. I was the medium of a providence that overruled it, that lifted the clouds gently from little green aspiring heads. I was not religious, but I was adjustable, which may be the divinest spirituality, provided

you get in the right place. I accomplished a relationship with the things about me that did not depend upon etiquette nor conversation, nor wealth, nor fashion. I wore plain white muslins and the green spears of the lilies were my foliage. I had an old wide-brimmed straw hat with no trimming upon it which I bent and tied under my chin. All the roses of the garden bloomed above my head as I knelt with soil-stained fingers here and there in the beds. I thought less of David. It was as if by some strange incantation I had drawn nearer not to him, but to that which had made him what he was when I first knew him, and when he loved only me. I was a kind of widow. And like widows of that age, I was not inconsolable. We are fuller of contradictions than the Holy Scriptures, which is saying a good deal. For within the green peace of the blossom scented days, there is no doubt about it, I still expected a lover. There is something veiled deep in the subconsciousness of every woman that waits for a lover. I do not know if we ever outgrow this maiden habit even when we marry and bring children into the world and fade and grow old. There come days when the middle-aged wife forgets herself, when she sits at the window and watches for her fat, bald-headed middle-aged husband in the same tune of mind she watched for

him before they were married. She astonishes him with a mood. She wants to be loved again as she was loved. All at once she is very sad because he does not understand, because he sits down heavily in the commonplace and looks at her vaguely wondering why on earth she demands to be told that she is still entrancingly beautiful, the bright beam in his eye, the sweet bobbin of all his thinking. Being a man he never suspects that this is a kind of infidelity she is working off on him, that she is tired of being the wife and mother, tired of his being the husband and father. She is the maiden again disguised in this homely woman, and she wants him to be the lover again. But he cannot. Men are not capable of this kind of back-acting sentimentality. So she treats him coldly. She is wounded. He feels guilty, but he does not know and cannot imagine of what he is guilty. This is how women acquire the reputation of being queer, mysterious, unaccountable. They go back now and then and become what they were. No man can follow them. He can only stand by astonished, confused, speaking the lies she demands of him by rote, and she knows they are lies, spoken in that manner, and she blames him bitterly for them, not because he said them, but because they are not the truth.

So some days when all the garden bloomed,

while the primroses died in the summer sunshine I used to stand by the hedge and look up and down the long dusty street, apparently, even to myself, merely looking up and down at nothing in particular. I was really looking for a man who could be a lover. Young nuns in a convent do the same thing when they think they are saying orisons to their saint beside their high casements. If any star in the heavens above them should change to a lover, their prayer, whatever the words of it, would be answered. And no doubt the Father of all stars and all maidens would not be angry, even if the Pope was. Love is not a sacrilege, it is a sacrament, the body and the blood of the life that has been given us by a Providence which understands us better than any priest. The sacrilege consists in not being honourable and faithful in loving. Theologians may say what they please, but I do believe this is the unforgivable sin. And yet we come perilously near many times, even if we do not commit it. At least this was one of my own experiences.

One morning after a rain, I came down into the garden wearing a freshly laundered muslin, my hat tied with a wide green ribbon. The June sun was shining. The air was warm and moist. I thought it was too hot to weed the pinks. I

went to the hedge and looked over. The street was full of people, men walking beneath the trees, women whisking along under their parasols, but yet no one in sight for me. I wondered how I should get through the day. This is more of a question when you are still beautiful and young and unmarried than it would be otherwise. And there was no answer to it in the heavens above, nor in the flowers beneath, all of which were engaged in the courtship of exchanging perfumed pollen.

I turned about with head down and started back into the house, walking in the narrow path between the moons and quarter moons. Suddenly I caught sight of a little irregular puff in the soil as if something beneath had raised a tiny tunnel during the night. It began under the smoke-tree, and wound about, but going in the general direction to where a row of young cosmos plants stood with thick plumy fronds upon the other side. I recognized my old enemy, the mole, that lived somewhere deep in the earth among the roots of the smoke-tree. Whenever a rain softened the ground, he became a civil engineer, tearing up the sod, and cutting the roots of the flowers as he went. Our interests conflicted, and for months I had made futile efforts to catch him. Even as I watched now, I saw the ground

near the cosmos break and rise as he tunnelled. I knew better than to attack him without cutting off his retreat. Experience had taught me that he could run back half a dozen different ways to his hole under the smoke-tree. I knelt softly where I stood and pushed my trowel deep in the ruffled earth through which he had just passed. Then I ran forward and thrust my hand in where he was working. The trouble is a mole can run faster backward than he can forward. For the fraction of a second my fingers touched the cold velvet skin. Then I beheld the ground rising, melting, giving down as he made with all speed in the other direction. The distance between where I was and the trowel was too great for me to reach. I dared not lift my hand. I had him trapped, but still beyond my grasp.

"Molly!" I shrieked, "come here quickly."

"What's the trouble?" demanded a deep voice.

I looked up startled to find Charlie Archibald standing beside me, his feet wide apart, his hands in his pockets, smiling down at me.

"It's the mole!" I cried. "He's down there by the trowel now. If you'll put your hand in there and work up this way we can catch him."

He went back, knelt down, pulled up his sleeve, stuck his hand in as I had directed.

"I felt him!" he yelled.

"Don't just feel him, Charlie, catch him! He's ruining the cosmos!" I exclaimed.

The chase began. We discovered a branch of his tunnel, leading among the clove pinks, just in time. We headed him off, only to find that he had another running parallel with the "bleeding hearts." We ran back and forth, trampling the flowers ruthlessly.

At last in the shadow of the summer-house we were sure we had cut off his last retreat. I knelt in a bed of sweet alyssum, Charlie was upon his knees a yard distant with his heels among the blue flags. My hat hung upon my shoulders suspended by the strings, my face was burning with excitement. I lifted a grimy hand to brush back a lock of hair blown across my eyes. Charlie laughed.

A redbird in the spirea bush began to call,

"Sweet! sweet! sweet!"

Far out the traffic of the town boomed along the streets, but the morning above the garden stood still, held its sweet breath while for a mere moment the prescience of a vague pain passed between us in a glance quickly withdrawn.

"Be careful!" thrusting his hand slowly along the tunnel. It was as if he said:

"Let us change the subject. We must change the subject! We were chasing this mole but now. You and I cannot think of each other!"

I flushed, fixed my eyes upon the bruised and fainting alyssum. Then, thankful for a right alarm, I exclaimed, half withdrawing my hand from the earth:

"Charlie, can — can a mole run up my sleeve?"

"No! It's the nature of a mole to run down."

He made a quick furrow, ripping the soil.

The next instant I felt my fingers seized, drawn up, clasped in a strong hand. Charlie looked at them astonished, they were red as rose petals covered with dirt. Then he bent his head above them, half dragging me from the alyssum as he pressed them to his lips. I drew them back quickly, sprang to my feet, and walked into the summer-house, holding the guilty hand behind me, my eyes filled with tears, my heart singing; my soul crying, "Shame! Shame!" All these things can take place instantly in that strange being, a woman. No wonder morality sometimes pulls its hat down and walks off till the farce is over.

"Your face is smudged and your hair is coming down," said Charlie following me in.

"Yours is as grimy as a stone mason's!" I retorted, not looking at him.

"Joy, what does all this horticulture mean? What's come over you?"

"I don't know," I answered dully.

He seated himself, took out his cigarette case and offered it to me.

"Let's smoke!"

"No, when tempted, do not even commit a transgression for fear you commit a crime later," I answered, paraphrasing what he had said to me long ago when we had our first smoke together.

"Wrong! Joy; still, I understand. Odd how our virtues tangled us in the web of pain. I am glad I caught the mole, anyhow!" he laughed, turning upon his heels and walking off.

This was the way we began again the old relation in the garden. After that, he never came in, but scarcely a day passed that he did not stop upon his way home outside the hedge, salute me, ask some trivial question, tell me some news of the town. I could not complain, I could not even forego the pleasure of being in the garden at that hour, between sundown and dark, when the shadows fell beside me like guarding presences. Once he brought a slender little green thing in his hand.

"Plant it in the shade," he said. "It is the 'Lady-of-the-lake.' "

This happened the beginning of the next spring. After that he came every day to inquire after her health, to know if she had bloomed.

At last one morning in April I found her lifting

a tiny pale blue bonnet of a blossom with part
tails, and out of the top of the bonnet there w
a queer little green cockade standing as straight
a feather.

He came in the twilight as usual.

"Charlie," I called to him, "she's put on h
Easter bonnet. Come and see her!"

No, he would not come. He looked at me sadl
across the hedge.

"I gave it to you with a wish like a boy, Joy,
and the wish has come true like the word of God,
dear. We'll keep it so!"

I stood watching him down the street. Then I
went back to the little flower blooming in the
dusk. This was the love we could not have,
kissing the hem of my gown, looking up at me
with virgin blue eyes.

So we had managed by the hardest to do right,
and had no joy in the doing. I am of the opinion
that those persons who take such noisy pleasure
in their integrity never know the cruelest tests.
Never could withstand them. From that day
until the one upon which this story ends I did not
see Charlie Archibald. And I saw Alice oftener.
Alice seemed to be the alternative in my life, the
crystal ball I went to stare at when I could not
read my fate in clearer meaning.

I will not say that Millidge forgot me as time

re on. Rather, it regarded me, I believe, with kind of silent amazement. It was not usual r a woman who had won so much distinction give up her place voluntarily in society without loosing a career, or even joining a club. I did either. And I refused to explain why I preferred flower garden to the rest of the world. This as because I did not prefer it, and because I was not willing to admit the fact.

. . . . . .

They all changed, the young men and women with whom I had entered the social whirl.

Chan Peters had married Mabel Leigh, and Bunk Hopgood married Lucy Gillfilling that spring. Lucy was a child in short frocks when I came out.

Augustus Brown was now Governor of the State. He had married Mrs. Franklin. I sometimes saw him on the street. We would exchange the most distant nod of recognition, I knew that I had come perilously near marrying him myself toward the end. But it had no weight now in my mind. It was like remembering a certain occasion when I might have fallen downstairs, but did not.

Emmet and Margaret were growing fat. He was a moderate kind of man who lost his hair and became bald shortly after his marriage.

Hair was immoderate, a youthful extravagance to be outgrown. She was a moderate kind of woman who presented him with a son the year after their marriage and ever after devoted herself to the child. He was recognized as a prominent, prosperous citizen. We attended the same church. Emmet was a vestryman. Every Sabbath we brushed past one another in the aisle of that place, or we took sacrament from the same cup and plate, arose and knelt, making our responses to Almighty God in unison out of the Book of Common Prayer. I used to look at him sometimes as he passed the contribution plate, his bald pate shining, the jowls of his face hanging down, red as the wattles of a turkey cock, and I was thankful I had also escaped that.

I was still beautiful, far more beautiful than I had ever been. That silence which is the last word of loveliness in the human countenance had now somehow enveloped me, and cleared my brow of that first inquisitiveness of mere youth. I had become the affirmative of what is sometimes called glorious womanhood. I no longer asked questions, nor answered them. I merely waited. I could not claim that I had been true to David. There was Charlie Archibald who had passed, not exactly like an accusation, but like a shadow between us. And there was Alice dying between

us. I was sure now that this was her malady, David, that which she had tried to escape in the lies of charity, in the dissolution of occultism. I almost pitied her — and went on living myself.

It is a great achievement to survive your own sorrow. Sorrow salivates the spirit of the average woman, restores her to the angels with the corners of her mouth turned down and a bad complexion. I refused to be salivated, and I kept a skin as fair as the lilies in my garden.

Meanwhile, I was obliged to pay more attention to father. He had given up the illusion of practising law. Some days he did not go downtown at all. He was making the last lap in the journey of life when a man returns home by the paths of his childhood. He was slipping back into that innocency of nature which sometimes waits for a man in his old age when his appetites die and his blood ebbs like a tide to rise upon another shore. He was beginning to practise little, old, childish virtues. He wanted to know what I had done with his prayer book. He remembered that he used to have one. He believed he would go to church next Sunday. What did I think of the idea? He told Francis that a man ought not to neglect his soul, that the time came when his soul was all a man had. Did Francis ever go to church? No? Well, that troubled him. Would

Francis go for his sake? Francis would not! Very well, then, in all probability he would be damned. He said he had felt the gravest anxiety for Francis spiritually. His own sins slipped off of him like water off of a duck's back. He remembered them against himself no more forever.

The garden as I cleared it came back to him like a song his mother used to sing. He would come out and spend whole days with me in it — scraping about foolishly with the trowel. He remembered when this or that rosebush was planted. He recalled the time when the jonquils stood in orderly rows around the moon beds. He was interested to discover that of all the flowers planted there so long ago only the "bleeding hearts" had remained sadly aloof beneath the shade of the walk. He was sorry that I could not remember my grandmother, who had first made the garden. This woman, changed to dust these many years, he thought still held the key to it, that there were certain things I could never understand because I had not known her. He imparted it as a secret to me one day that mother did not get on well with the flowers. He said she made war upon them. He had known her to get as angry with a hyacinth for coming up in the wrong place as if it had fallen from grace.

Speaking of mother reminded him that he felt

very weak, faint. He would go in the summer-house, and wait patiently if I would see if I could find a little cordial to revive him. Perhaps there was some whiskey in the house. He regretted that Francis was so niggardly about the sideboard. A gentleman ought always to keep a decanter there.

The muscles in the back of his legs were relaxing, causing him to slur the ground softly with his heels as he walked. But being revived by the cordial, or the julep, or whatever I could find to comfort him, he would go on artlessly garrulous.

He attached a significance to the fact that bulbs moved about like men looking for new homes. He wished vaguely that he could go somewhere himself. He had bloomed too long in the same place. He was getting into a rut. That was the matter with him. Didn't I think so?

He propounded this question to me slyly one evening as we sat in the garden waiting for Francis to come home.

I looked at him. He was pale. The flesh that had been his double chin hung in a fold. His cheeks were sunken. His eyes full of longing. He was a poor old pilgrim who felt the parting of time. He was in a vague hurry to be going somewhere. He was restless with this coming instinct of Eternity.

"You do need a change, father," I said, "some little diversion. You have not been downtown this week. To-night after dinner we'll go down to the Buckhaulters'."

"No," he objected, "I'm tired of the Buckhaulters. Buckhaulter can't play a good game any more. He's too old to remember his cards. And he never could talk!"

"Well, then where do you want to go?" I asked kindly.

"I don't know — away from Millidge. I used to travel a good deal, Joy. Used to know a lot of people. Had a friend in New York. We sometimes went down to Atlantic City together. Haven't been there in twenty years. Never got away often after I married. Things went wrong. Lost a lot of money. Wish I could see old Morgan again. Your mother never liked him, you understand, and what women don't know they suspect. She thought Morgan had a bad influence on me. She was always looking for bad influences. Mighty good woman, your mother was, Joy!" he concluded with a sigh.

Then presently he began again.

"Don't you ever want to get away?" he asked, turning his face to me, and regarding me carefully.

"I never think of it," I answered dully.

"But don't you ever aim to marry?" he persisted.

"Husbands don't grow in gardens!" I laughed, trying to be patient.

"It's not right and it's not natural! I want to see my daughter in the world where she belongs. I will speak to Francis!" he exclaimed, rising with an effort and starting for the house.

"Don't, it will only annoy him," I advised.

"I will speak to him, I say. He has no right to keep the most beautiful woman in this country fastened up here like a hen in a coop!" he retorted, striking his stick upon the ground.

We still regarded Francis as our natural enemy. A man who prospered outrageously in his business, who never took a vacation himself, and who would, I thought, be far from conceding one to the members of his family who did no business at all.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THIS desire for a change was the beginning of a long struggle between father and Francis. I do not think there is anything so strong as the whimpering persistence of a weakness. The hardest man must finally yield to its everlasting importunity if he cannot escape it. This is why so many women have their way. And it also accounts for the tyranny old people sometimes exercise over the younger members of their family. The family cannot get rid of them, and it cannot reason with their childishness. There is no cessation of the plaintive demand and no peace until they get the thing they desire.

Father exercised all the cunning of paresis in this matter. We heard nothing morning, noon, and night but Atlantic City. He praised the air, the sea, the sky, the everlasting life and diversion to be found on the Board Walk. He thought even the fog was good, stimulating like the mist of wine in the nostrils. He remembered a certain Casino where the music was very fine. He supposed with a sigh that the music was even better there now. He recalled a Palm Garden.

He had heard that this place now had a cabaret in it where there was some exceptionally good dancing. He remembered the gay Bohemian atmosphere of this place. He called to mind a good many things that he should have forgotten, a girl with feathers in her hair and a mere frill around her waist who used to dance somewhere in a little place on the Board Walk twenty years ago. He considered her the finest artist with her legs he had ever seen. Then his mood would change and he would think only of the sea, how noble it was, how it affected his soul, emblem of the great Eternity. You might have supposed to hear him that the ocean never appeared anywhere else off the shores of this continent except at Atlantic City. He would sit at the dinner table in the evening with folded hands, his head bowed, his chin upon his breast, knife and fork crossed idly upon his plate. He had no appetite. But he remembered how hearty he had been at Atlantic City. The food was very fine — best he'd ever tasted. He was sure that if he could only eat he would feel stronger, take more interest in his business. He knew that his practice was going. Buckhaulter had never understood law. Still, feeling as he did now, he could do nothing with it.

He sent a letter to his old friend Morgan, and

by the devil's own luck, according to Francis Morgan received it. He wrote in reply that he always spent the month of August at Atlantic City, and that nothing would give him more pleasure than to meet father there. They would revive old times. They would do a thing or two. Father read excerpts from this letter to us one evening after dinner. Then with a sigh he folded it and put it back in his pocket. But every time Francis came in after that, he would take it out and cast his eye silently over it. He began to sit all day in his chair. No, he would not come with me into the garden. No, he did not feel strong enough to go to church that Sabbath. He did not remember ever having attended divine services in Atlantic City, but he thought he would like to do so. Where was the Isle of Patmos and the seven candlesticks? Would Joy kindly get his Bible for him. He believed he would read about the Isle of Patmos instead of going to church! The rector was a damn fool anyhow! Last time he had been to hear him, he preached from the text: "And Sampson went out and shook himself." What in hell did he mean by it? There was no gospel in a man's going out and shaking himself, and no sense in that discourse. He was himself a poor old star revolving in the dust. He had seen better days, when he could

go where he pleased, when he was beholden to no man for his comfort, much less to his own children. Sharper than a serpent's tooth was an ungrateful child — Francis would live to regret his parsimony to his old father, so forth, and so on.

Francis had his own notions about who should be grateful in his family, but Nature had placed him in the wrong relation to the situation for him to defend himself. At the end of three weeks he yielded the point. One evening — after a particularly trying day with father — he called me into the library, looking angrily defeated.

"Joy, I can't afford this trip father wants to Atlantic City, but I can't stand his puling importunities any longer. I have told him he can go. Make your plans to accompany him." He hesitated, frowning, I could almost see his pockets shrinking, as he added:

"I suppose you will need some — things!"

"I suppose I shall," I answered coolly.

"Get them. Damn it! I wish I had a son in college, some excuse to offer against this outrageous extravagance!"

The next morning father put on his hat, a trifle to one side, and started out walking jauntily. He was going downtown. He was himself again. He must give Buckhaulter some instructions about

the case of Brown versus Smith. Buckhaulter was a fool, and he might bungle the whole thing in his absence.

I went the same day to Madame Prince, feeling strangely elated. For two years now I had been reduced to choosing sensible, even durable things to wear, made by a sewing woman. Cupid despises a sewing woman. And the girl who pins her faith to a bodice designed by one need not look for love in the high places. The thing may fit, but it does not endear her to a man. Because sewing women come from a class where virtue and thrift predominate over the lace and the frill Frenchiness of real sweetheart toggery. The seamstress I employed was a poor dreary-eyed, hard-working person who sewed for me as if she were making penitential sackcloth garments for a little bean pole of salvation. I never could recognize myself in the frocks she made.

And Madame did not know me either at first when I entered her establishment that morning. Naturally that she should not recognize Joy Marr, the girl whom she had helped to become the belle of Millidge seven years before, in this tight shirt-waist and mournful skirt. It is a mistake to suppose that the belles and grande dames who move in society are the real creators of it. The modiste who designs and makes their gowns comes

nearer doing it. The most brilliant woman in the world could not hold her own in it if a mere seamstress made her clothes.

Madame received me haughtily in a little room with a raised platform in the middle of the floor.

"I think perhaps you have made a mistake," she said, looking at me as if I had been a remnant.

"Madame," I exclaimed, "don't you know me, Joy Marr? Don't you remember the Hallowe'en gown you ordered for me from Paris?"

"Oh!" she answered dryly. "What can I do for you, Miss Marr?"

"I came in to see if you could make ——"

"Something serviceable, I suppose?" she interrupted, still regarding me coldly over her nose glasses with her little fat hands crossed in her lap.

It was difficult to explain. She was accustomed to lose her belle customers after they married or retired into spinsterhood, but she was not accustomed to having one to come back in this manner and demand to bloom again. Besides, she was one of those proudest of all beings, an aristocrat who had come down in the world, and she continued to make the richest women feel this like a thorn in the side every time she condescended to take up with her own fingers their underarm darts. She positively would not do it either until

she was sure her bill would be paid. Also, it was beneath the dignity of a true artist to be limited in the price. She recalled that she had had some difficulty with Mr. Francis Marr about the last bill. She had been offended, wounded in her artistic sensibilities.

I hastened to explain, and to assure her that if I got of her what I wanted, she might charge what she pleased.

But, beg pardon, what did I want?

That also I made clear with some embarrassment.

"Oh, to be a rose again, to bloom in another place. Good! very good — and wise. So many girls did not think of the advantage of transplanting their charms!

"I know exactly what you require, my dear. Now, will you stand here upon the form. It is a divine moment when the true artist looks for the right inspiration."

I mounted the platform. Madame inspected me, humming a little tune. She laid a critical finger upon my former waistline. What in heaven's name had I done with my zone? There was no proper curve here: a frightful error, a concession that should never have been made she divested me of the shirtwaist. I felt the tug of my corset laces, and a yielding of my

anatomy to the spirit. For the first time in two years I felt the spirit in me rise above the waistline. A happy sensation. I understand how a swan feels when it curves its neck. Does it because it cannot curve its breast bone. I had the swan feeling. I began to use my neck properly. Madame tried this colour and that. She draped me in mauve and pink. She believed what I needed was green. She knew exactly how to make a pale girl look like an anemone and a florid one look like a languorous rose. Whatever your fault was, she exaggerated that, enhanced it and called it your charm, your distinction. Mine, she said, was abounding vitality, health, fairness — therefore, green, the resurrection colour of life in nature.

At the end of an hour I went away comforted, as if I had been born again, and in the right place. My whole mind was changed.

I spent the next two weeks in outward preparation, and in preparations within that were even more remarkable. I was once more the adventuress, a woman bent upon the everlasting quest. To have all one's virtues, but no husband! That, of course, was not so bad as to have no virtues, but it was not good. I was deliberately planning a campaign for matrimony at Atlantic City. I concentrated upon that. When a woman of

twenty-seven begins to look for a husband, sh
is looking for an anticlimax, not that all husband
are anticlimaxes, but the metamorphosis in th
maiden's mind to that of this shrewder woma
who has put aside mere lovers for a matrimonia
commodity is in the nature of bad prosody. Bu
I accomplished it. I had had lovers, and I ha
entertained the ambition to marry a rich man
The difference now was that I was ready to loo
just for some one to marry. Women do com
to that. Those who achieve husbands know wha
a trial they are, but those who have not got them
do mightily crave this natural exasperation.

Mrs. Buckhaulter was astonished at the chang
in me. She wondered what it meant. She came
over one day and called my attention to the fac
that I was neglecting the garden. Lilies required
watering during July if they bloomed properly in
August. She was surprised that I did not know
that. I did know it. But I did not care whether
a single lily bloomed in August.

It is true, we are made by environment. But
occasionally that which we really are escapes
and it is not what we are made by environment
Two years of frightful discipline had not changed
me. I reverted joyfully to type, and practised
prettiness before my mirror with the same ardour
a bird flirts with its shadow in a pool.

I went to see Alice, startled her out of a trance with the news of what was afoot — not the real thing, but merely that father and I were going away.

She was reclining upon the sofa in her tiny parlour, reading "The Voice of the Silence."

"Joy, darling, when will you learn that one may get away, may ascend, without ever going anywhere at all?"

"I don't want to ascend. I just want a change, and father must have it. He is much better already even at the prospect," I laughed.

She thought it was foolish, still she loaned me her pearls and a lace scarf. And she hoped I'd enjoy myself. I left her listless, preoccupied. I wondered if she ever thought of David now.

David! I would not think of him! Yet that night as I lay with my eyes wide in the dark trying to plan what I should do, how I should look, straining to imagine who and where and how I should meet there this next man — the face of David arose before me — a dear and distant reality. It was as if far away, beyond my knowledge of where he was, he appeared like a vision. He searched me with mournful eyes, not accusing, as if he knew of me what I did not know of myself. I was irritated. I tried to sleep and wept instead. Love, real love, is an awful faithfulness which

may survive even in the least faithful. It is a divine integrity which we sometimes suffer against our wills.

. . . . . .

The first week in August found father and me established in one of the quieter hotels in Atlantic City. Twenty years before it had been the gayest hostelry there. Now it sustained the same relation to the place that the Bailey does to South Kensington in London. It was sedate, had required a pedigree for respectability, and a hold upon a strand of guests reaching from New York to San Francisco, who came season after season as birds migrate.

The meeting between father and Mr. Morgan was pathetic, with an element of comedy in it. They were both very old, dragging their hind legs, so to speak, with all the strength they had in the opposite direction from the grave.

They stood in the lobby, each reared back, two old blades regarding one another with whimsical inquisitiveness. As if the one asked the other:

"Well, can you still go the pace? How is your stroke? Play billiards yet? Know a pretty ankle when you see one? Good Lord, man! don't tell me you have lost your interest in the fair sex. And your health? Mine never was better

— feel to-day just as I used to feel when we came here together — like a three-year-old with the bridle off."

I stood aside watching the inventory they made of each other, astonished that father denied his gout, perfectly sure by Morgan's slipshod tenderness of foot that he suffered from the same malady.

"I want you to meet my daughter," said father, turning and beckoning to me.

"Joy, this is Mr. Mortimer Morgan, of whom you have heard me speak so often."

"My dear young lady, this is one of the happiest days of my life," exclaimed the old gentleman, struggling with his short fat body to bring it down in a proper bow and to get it up again. "Marr, she flatters you. Never knew before that a bird of Paradise could resemble an old cock!" he went on, regarding me with open admiration.

"She is like me," father affirmed with serene satisfaction.

Then they both began to fidget, to shift from one foot to the other and strain at the leash of politeness. They were anxious to be gone. They fumbled in their lying old heads for an excuse to get away. Father had the expression of a lame old war horse with his head over the bar sniffing the wind.

"Joy," he said presently, "I have something

to show Morgan, most extraordinary development of this place. Be back in five minutes."

They linked arms and went out, each striking a pace, a slight and painful strut, and going in the direction of the bar.

This happened in the evening after dinner upon the day of our arrival.

The orchestra was playing a selection from "Madame Butterfly." The guests were gathering in the greenroom below around little tables, smoking, and drinking coffee, beautifully gowned women, hard-looking, well-groomed men. I went up and chose a seat beside the wall near the door. I wore a white embroidered marquisette over satin, with Alice's scarf merely outlining my shoulders. I felt very much at home, very sure of myself. This is a courage the most timid woman acquires when she knows she is making as good or a better appearance than any other woman in sight. Female courage is largely a matter of clothes. The boldest woman in society would become modest, retiring, if she was suddenly reduced to wearing a plain high-necked muslin that had been laundered and darned.

Among the other guests there was a man seated at one of the tables near the centre of the room, smoking a cigarette. He was tall and extremely well dressed. He had a large head with thick

black hair sprinkled with gray, a mouth which in spite of the thickness of the lips he kept drawn close in a tight red line beneath a short moustache, nearer black than his hair. His chin was deeply notched, his cheeks full; he had large, heavy, slowly moving eyes with which he searched the room for what he wanted.

I was apparently that. From the moment he discovered me, he fixed his gaze appraisingly upon me. It was the look of a turfman in a stable. No admiration in it, merely calculation. No woman likes it. She feels that there is an error in his point of view, that his gaze is directed to her person, not to her. She feels that he has a knowledge of her sex which is not complimentary, and that he is estimating her according to this knowledge. There is no greater mistake to be made than to endure it. You make exactly the concession he has in mind.

Feeling this, I arose and went to my room. Father must have gone to his some time during the night. But I had every reason to believe that he and Morgan tried each other to the limit of their endurance. For, the next morning they were only two sulky old men willing to take the Board Walk in a rolling chair. Before the end of the day they had both admitted their afflictions and they now spent their time exchang-

ing sympathy and symptoms of their pains. They could not understand how they came to have certain troubles. Neither of them would have admitted that gout is a kind of logic based upon the premises of a certain way of living. Father said he inherited his from his mother who developed rheumatism in the little finger of her left hand when she was about his age. Morgan refused to accuse his mother. He said every one in the East had it, came from the climate. The very wind there had swollen joints.

I spent much of my time attending these two old invalids the first week, listening to their eloquent and sometimes comically veiled reminiscences, accompanying them upon the Board Walk when they could not by any means get rid of me. I was astonished and fascinated at the appearance and significance of this famous promenade. It was like a bargain counter of humanity, four miles long, covered so thick that one could never see the boards beneath the moving throng of every imaginable kind of man or woman, from every nation and every country, from all the alleys and by-ways and Broadways of the cities of the world. Long strands of rolling chairs wound back and forth through it like adult baby carriages. Thousands of women with horribly sad faces painted to represent joy and health

tripped over it. Thousands of young ones looking this way and that, always apparently looking for something, somebody. And men coming and going to match the sorrow in those that were painted, and the expectation of those who were searching. Now and then a poor old remnant like father or Mr. Morgan limping along like an answer to the whole thing.

This was the year when fashion passed from the realism of outrageously narrow skirts, of straight revealing lines back into the romanticism of folds and draperies, but still showing its stocking within the slit skirts. You may always know when fashion is going back to the prettier charm of sentimentality by the fact that it begins to puff out its sleeves and to catch up its folds with knots of ribbon or flowers, and to draw in its waistline, and to say in every conceivable way that there is somewhere concealed in these folds and draperies a far more entrancing form than could possibly reveal herself in the narrow integrity of the recent ugly fashion.

And I admit it here. I may have had a bad mind, but I had the feeling that one had only to get into this moving stream, so silent, yet so animated, to have the sensation that one really was a commodity, for sale or exchange. The very place hawked you. The surf was full

of bathers, every pier full of spectators. Bu
whatever you did, whether you appeared in you
abbreviated sea togs or your tailored clothes
you seemed to demonstrate what you were worth
This, I say, may have been due to the state of m
own mind, which was undoubtedly willing t
consider a transaction in matrimony. And tha
which afforded a significance to the situation fo
me was the stranger I had seen the first night in
the greenroom. I could not go out or come in
without being aware of this man in my immediate
neighbourhood. I was not acquainted with th
specie. In the South we do have silent, moon
eyed lovers who stand and gaze sometimes before
they are really introduced, but always with a
kind of humility, never impudently appraising
I began at last to feel as if I were being stalked
patiently and persistently by a large and dangerous
animal of a kind that was entirely unknown to me

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

ONE evening after dinner father and I were seated upon the veranda of the hotel. A rain had fallen. But now the sky was clearing. The moon shone like a bright shepherdess in a wandering flock of little clouds. The Board Walk glistened wet beneath the arc lights. Guests were pouring out of the hotel, ascending the incline, and mingling with the ever-increasing throng. The air was filled with the music of near and distant orchestras, with faint peals of laughter, and the sound of many voices. All gay, all filled with the rapture of the sea.

Father was smoking. I was wondering if after all nothing was going to happen for me. This place so suggestive of intrigue, of love's adventures, remained somehow beyond my capacity. I was like a poor mariner becalmed. Water everywhere and none to drink. Men everywhere and not one to pay court to me, no one to whom I could speak except these two blades with their legs squeezed up in rubber stockings.

I thought of Millidge, a mere pin point in the distance, with its life going on in the summer heat

like the droning of bees in a garden. I thought of David, removed now in consciousness further than the farthest star shining above this wide expanse of tumbling gray water. I thought of the stranger I had seen so often regarding me, choosing me out of the crowd, silently, persistently with fine attention. I felt sometimes as if he were carefully numbering the strands of my hair, the two curls that crinkled up on my neck, that he said to himself:

"All golden!"

I knew that he studied my face, I had felt him make a note of my brows, of the colour of my eyes. I had sometimes seen him draw nearer when I was speaking to father or to Mr. Morgan, and understood that he was trying to catch the tones of my voice. Once when I laughed at some limping witticism of father's I caught a fleeting applause in his quickening eye, as if he said to himself:

"That laugh — it matches her eyes and her golden hair."

As I considered all these tokens of his interest, I began to be irritated at the fact that he sought no means of meeting me. I was sure he could have accomplished this if he desired to do so.

Father straightened up in his chair, looked over his shoulder impatiently as if he was weary of waiting to keep an appointment.

At this moment Mr. Morgan came out, hobbling painfully. He was accompanied by some one.

Father settled back slyly in his chair. Mr. Morgan hurried forward with his companion. He halted in front of me, the other standing beside him tall and smiling.

"Miss Marr, I want to present my friend, Mr. Roger Collier. This young lady, Collier, is the last and loveliest of a family distinguished in the South for its beautiful women!"

He puffed out the introduction, faced it with this glaring compliment and bowed.

"Mr. Collier," I murmured, startled and blushing furiously. I recognized the stranger of whom I had just been thinking. I was confused like a person who has received an immediate answer to prayer and does not know what to do with it.

Mr. Morgan refused to sit down. Father arose with so much alacrity that I perceived they had something afoot which did not include me.

"Fine large night, Mr. Collier," said father. He and Morgan would take a stroll, if we would excuse them. Yes, of course, they would return presently.

They made off, arm in arm, heads reared back, their sticks clacking upon the floor. Father's "presently" always meant the next morning.

We watched them descend to the pavement,

then we looked at each other and exchanged a smile which covered the situation so far as they were concerned.

Roger Collier seated himself beside me, and we began one of those prefatory conversations two persons who really know each other sometimes engage in by way of getting through the formality of first acquaintance.

I am unable to recall what we said. It does not matter, for we did not say anything we really thought. I discovered he was entirely different from the men I had known. That he was brilliant, splendidly educated, far and away the most delightful person I had ever heard talk. And I soon perceived that he was not interested in what I said any more than a grown person is interested in reading a primer, but that he was interested in me, myself, in the tones of my voice, in my appearance, in merely the femininess of this feminine. He discussed ideas and courted me with his eyes. I whipped up the draperies of my fanciful mind and pretended to follow him, looking demurely out at the stars as if they were first cousins of mine.

At the end of an hour father had not returned. I said I must go in and write some letters. He accompanied me to the door. He hoped he would see me next day and so forth.

That was the beginning of the affair between us which lasted for two weeks. We seemed to say to one another each evening: "To be continued to-morrow." I did not know if it was a summer flirtation, or if he was really in earnest. I was serious enough in my own purpose, however veiled it might be beneath the apparently accidental meetings we accomplished and the apparently aimless diversions of each day. I was once more the unscrupulous virgin bent upon adventure, but not merely adventure. I was in that extremity next to spinsterhood from which only a husband can rescue a woman. I did not ask myself what manner of husband this man would make. The important thing was to get one. I was not in love with him, but I was absorbed in the determination to win him if I could. I reflected that a woman can always manage the man she marries if she is not in love with him. This was my protection.

There are portions of our lives here and there which we instinctively try to forget, days that do not record our greatest griefs or misfortunes, but which are dreadfully biographical of a life in us that we desire to disown. Looking back, I find this blur over the remaining two weeks of the time father and I spent in Atlantic City. The mind itself refuses to vivify incidents far more

definite than many others set down in these pages. I am unwilling to the truth, a disposition to atone for it with explanations and excuses. And when you think of it, there is no fault so grave, no crime so wicked that we cannot palliate in this manner. I may as well put in the excuse, the palliation here. Later, I perceived that there was none equal to the transgression I committed.

A good woman has no knowledge of the length and breadth of a certain masculine unscrupulousness. She lacks the terrible, devastating experience for this understanding. She walks safely upon the edge of a precipice because she does not see the depths below. The worst man is often the most fascinating, is always the most attractive to her, provided he conceals his identity beneath the cloak of gallantry and courtesy. He is the most accomplished lover in the world. He is an artist in emotions. She is merely his tambourine. I experienced this pleasure to an extraordinary degree in Collier's company. He made love not as David had done with the definite avowal of an honest man; not as Emmet had done with the ardour of an angry cynic; not with the boyish exaggerations of my young beaux, but with the discrimination of a fine elegance, as if love was an art, not an emotion, as if this was a

little drama, written by an excellent playwright not to be bungled. Each act, every situation to be worked out with delicacy, and a certain fine precision.

The less you love really, the more does the manner of acting love appeal. From the first I entered shrewdly into the spirit of the thing, merely wondering how he would manage the climax.

The Board Walk became a mystic maze through which I came always to meet Collier. The rest of the people there were only "supers." We were the two stars upon the stage.

The next morning after our talk upon the veranda, I bestowed father and Mr. Morgan in their rolling chair, and followed afoot. I wore a white cloth suit, a white hat, I was a slim figure in the dense throng with my face lifted like a semaphore. Presently I saw him, smiling at me over the shoulders of half a hundred people.

"Going somewhere?" he asked, elbowing his way to me.

"Yes, I am the honourary escort of two old gentlemen in a rolling chair," I answered.

"Last seen on the Heinz Pier, half an hour ago!" he laughed. "Never could overtake them in this crowd."

We faced about, descended to the sands, found

a cool place, and spent the morning watching the bathers.

Every day after that we began in this manner; we managed to find corners not invaded by the crowd, freshened and cooled by the spray of the surf. We spent hours considering each other in desultory talk about other matters, wondering what we were going to do about it. At least I wondered. I left the question to him. The dénouement in a play of this kind must be accomplished by the hero. I made no attempt to entertain him. When a man is thinking of you, of you the woman, it is madness to disturb the concentration of his instincts by appealing to his mind. I left him to carry on these monologues with himself about me while I sat beside him serenely silent, sure of my appearance, of my nerve, and of my patience.

One afternoon we were having tea far down the Walk. The place was nearly empty. He looked at me quizzically across the table.

"Joy! — is that your title or your name?" he asked.

"My name," I answered smiling.

"Well, you'll be obliged to remain as you are then. You could never marry and keep it," he said.

"Why?" I asked, disagreeably startled by something veiled in his tones

"Because a man could never call his wife 'Joy' after" — he hesitated and then brought it out coolly — "after the first six months."

"That would depend upon the kind of woman she was, wouldn't it?" I retorted.

"Something happens to every kind of woman in marriage. 'Joy' is the name of a man's mate, not his wife." He said it as if he measured me with this sentence.

"Still, my name is 'Joy,' and 'Joy' I shall remain," I replied, rising.

We came out upon the Walk, the tide was slipping in over the red horizon, every wave capped with foam.

"Yes," he agreed, "'Joy' is your label. And it fits you, defines you as the foam defines the nature of the sea. To-morrow, to-night, when the wind dies down, it will be gone, that lacy lightness of the water. Shall we make the most of 'Joy' while it lasts?" He turned to me gravely.

"You speak a riddle. I do not understand you," I murmured, looking away from him.

"You do not understand love, then."

"No? What is love?" I questioned.

"The tide," he answered.

"That ebbs?"

"Yes!"

"I do not like your definition."

"Because you do not like the truth. Women never do."

"Is this the truth?"

"That I love you? Yes."

"That the tide ebbs?" I retorted quickly.

"We cannot change the laws of Nature by loving. Let us be content with the present hour."

"But I am not content with the to-morrow of your outrageous knowledge," I replied, looking at him with troubled eyes seeing in his for the first time a grim passion.

"Very well, to-morrow we shall know more about it. To-morrow we will go up to the Inlet and question the sea at that place. Since I think of it," he smiled, "the Inlet affects the flow there, guards it into a narrow channel, and I know a quiet place to sit beneath the Walk. Will you come?"

"Yes," I agreed as we ascended the steps of the hotel.

Shadows have a queer effect upon characters, like environment. The next day we had scarcely reached the Inlet when the sky was suddenly overcast. We hurriedly descended from the Walk and took refuge from the approaching storm. The place was very dark. The rain began to fall in torrents. The waves racing in before the wind threw their spray over us. I

looked at him, in the quick alarm a woman always feels when lightning slits the sky and thunder rumbles threateningly overhead.

I looked and drew back. He was no longer the delightful companion, nor even the lover. I beheld a man who had discarded his manners, who stood a little distance from me waiting for me with an expression so changed, so significant, that I could scarcely have recognized him. He seemed all at once to belong to this darkness. This was his cave, the place in which he really lived. I could not have been so blinded by the swiftest flash of lightning or the most frightful crash of thunder.

Instantly, and before I could be sure of what I had seen, he changed, became again the easy man of the world with merely the corners of an ugly smile left upon his face to indicate what he had been the moment before.

The storm passed as swiftly as it had come. We ascended to the Walk, each labouring vainly to cover the breach that had been made. We sought diligently for something to say and said nothing.

I was disturbed, uneasy, as if I had been guilty of this thing that had not happened. What was it? I refused to know.

I did not come down to dinner, pleading a headache.

The next morning he sent me some roses with a note saying he hoped my indisposition had passed. The formality of it reassured me.

Late in the afternoon I went up on the Walk. I made a little pilgrimage in and out of the shops. I was looking for some gifts to take back to Mrs. Buckhaulter and Alice. My mind was still occupied with Collier. He was too slow with his love-making, having begun it I thought. It was as if he waited for me to accept his premises before he risked a declaration. What were these premises? That was the question I asked myself as I went on pricing things: collars, scarfs, Japanese curios. I came at last to a little shop filled with laces. The walls covered with patterns of Irish and Venetian and fillet. At the end of the narrow room was a red door with a sign hung upon it. This was a large and hideous hand with the lines in it blackened and exaggerated like a poster of Fate. Beneath was scrawled the invitation:

YOUR PALM READ
PAST AND FUTURE TOLD
SATISFACTION GUARANTEED

I held up a Maltese lace collar and considered this sign over it. A little old man opened the door and came out. He wore a white turban

upon his head. The pupils of his eyes were constructed as if he were under the influence of some drug. The lids swollen. He regarded me keenly. He was a Hindoo and gave the impression of immemorial age. I felt as if I were being stared at through the secrets of a thousand years as he advanced bowing and cringing with his eyes fixed upon my face.

"Lady, have your palm read? I can tell you something important. Fate, lady, is at this moment standing behind you. I can tell you what you long to know, what you would give much to know. Only one dollar to-day."

I was fascinated and disgusted. I returned the collar to the woman behind the counter, ignoring her voluble entreaties, and started out.

Collier stood in the door, smiling. I knew that he had witnessed the scene and was now amused by the seriousness of my face, that it betrayed something of my superstitious fear.

"Lady, have your palm read," he began, imitating the insinuating tones of the Indian.

"No, no, I do not believe in it. I ——"

"All women believe in fortune tellers," he interrupted. "Go ahead and hear what he has to say. It will amuse you."

"No, it will not; besides, I am afraid of that horrid creature," I whispered.

"Prophets and seers are never agreeable looking. I'll go in with you."

"Very well, if you will let him read your palm first!" I laughed.

"No, not necessary. If he tells your fortune, that will indicate mine."

"So, I have only to see the lady's palm one moment. What is there will be the meaning in yours," the Indian put in with a sinister smile.

"It is foolish, but it will amuse us," I agreed.

There was scarcely room for three persons in the narrow closet we entered, which was lighted with a red-shaded lamp. I sat with my hand upon the table, outstretched like a lily in the red gloom. Collier stood against the wall. The old palmist bent over, touched my fingers with his lean brown claws, marked a strong life line, a sanguine temperament. Then bending farther over, he stared as if he searched the clouded depths of a pool. He raised his malignant eyes to Collier.

"Will the gentleman go out? I have something to tell the lady alone!" he said.

"No!" I exclaimed. "Say what you have to say. It makes no difference. Remain, Mr. Collier."

"Very well," sneered the Indian. "There are two men, my lady, in your life, both dark, but different. You love the one and you do not love

the other. You" — he hesitated, choosing his words carefully — "you thought, perhaps in this hour, or yesterday, very recently, that you were in danger ——"

Collier cleared his throat, moved. It was as if he had said to the Indian:

"Enough of that."

"But no!" the old man went on impudently; "danger for my lady comes from within always, never from without."

He sighed, trembled, closed his eyes. Sweat suddenly beaded his forehead.

"I see deep shadows in a garden, flowers walking to and fro in wedding wreaths, a bridegroom in the moonlight. How is this, my lady, so far from here! And you — the curtain drawn across a window conceals you. I cannot see. But your fate, you cannot imagine it. You must pass through a shadow, something not good — to reach it — now very soon."

I snatched my hand away, springing to my feet.

"It is always so!" the old wretch smiled, wagging his head. "They will not hear the truth. They know it already. They want to believe what is not the truth. They would change the stars in their courses, these ladies, to get their way, which is always wrong."

We went out into the glaring sunlight.

"You were annoyed," said Collier, looking at me curiously.

"Yes, it makes one feel uncanny, that red light, that hideous old man with his foolish lies," I answered.

"Still, I almost thought he trod upon the toes of some truth. You looked so startled. These people do read what is already in the mind, even if they cannot see the future," he insisted.

"Well, he did not read what was in mine!" I laughed.

We were seated upon the porch outside the Casino that night. The orchestra was playing an andante from Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. The persistence of the same phrase represented always in sad simplicity produced little by little a strange and poignant sensation in me. It was as if it carried a cry, a warning to that other Joy Marr whom I did not know.

There was to be a dance later. Guests were already assembling inside. Handsomely gowned women stood in groups with their escorts whispering or waiting in silence for the intermission. I wore a white gown with an overskirt and bodice of green chiffon! I had thrown Alice's scarf over my head. It fell in misty folds upon my shoulders. Roger Collier sat facing me with his chair drawn up beside mine.

We always know what is going to happen before it does happen. We only think we do not know. But when the thing is done, the word is said, we know that we have been waiting for that and nothing else, exactly that.

The music changed, the dance began. Suddenly my companion leaned forward and lifted my hand from the arm of the chair, held it tightly in his.

"Joy," he said, speaking in low, measured tones, "before we go in, before we dance together, I want to know that you are mine. I love you. I am insanely, madly in love with you. Do you know that?"

"No," I murmured, "I did not know."

"Yes, you did. I have been afraid to say, to tell you what I mean. You are narrow. You will not accept the truth. But listen! You must! I want you to be my Joy, just that!"

I drew back, barely escaping his lips.

"But you said, you know what you said about Joy," I gasped, looking at him.

"Yes, that's what I mean — I can offer you — in exchange —— "

I almost saw the purse in his hand.

The next moment I was moving blindly through the whirling wreath of dancers, walking unsteadily, trying to avoid them. The door on the other

side seemed miles away. I wondered if I ever could reach it. I stumbled over the feet of a tall woman seated beside the wall, heard her mumble an indignant protest. I was stricken dumb.. I implored her silently and passed on. At last I stepped down into the fragrant darkness of an arbour which connected the Casino with the hotel.. I gathered up my gown and fled. I was beside myself, I was overwhelmed with a shame which I suddenly felt that I had been risking, half expecting, since this affair began.

As I entered the hotel I saw father seated in the lobby, his paper had slipped from his hand. He was asleep, his head wagged to one side, his lips parted.

"Father," I said, laying my hand upon his shoulder.

He started, opened his eyes, and stared at me.

"What is it, Joy? What has happened? You look ——"

"Father, we must go home!" I interrupted.

He straightened himself.

"But we have another week here," he protested.

"Not another hour!" I exclaimed, struggling to suppress my excitement.

"We can't go to-night. What's the matter, I say?" he insisted.

"We will go early in the morning, then," I said.

"I thought you liked it here?" he complained.

"I hate it!"

"What will Francis say? He expected you — I told him that if you had the opportunity ——"

"Hush, father," I commanded, leading him forward.

Very well, but he did not understand it. Everything going so nicely, now this! He was a poor old man, dragged about by his children, who would regret it when he was gone!

I had that night the final revelation of myself. When the packing was finished and all was in readiness for our departure the next morning, I sat considering myself in relation to what had happened, to Collier's scarcely veiled proposal that I should become his mistress.

This was the logical conclusion toward which I had been going from the first, even from that day long ago when I resolved to marry a rich husband. Collier knew of me, what I had never entirely admitted to myself, that what I wanted was money, luxuries. The husband was only the means to this end. He offered the means, but not the husband. It was really a fair exchange, seeing that I was ready to exchange merely myself, not my heart. Women do this without a qualm every day. I would have done it if I had not met a

man as unscrupulous as I was myself. The awful question I was now obliged to answer was this: The husband I was willing to take unloved, was he not merely the cloak for the same dishonour Collier proposed? This man with his brutal proposition was after all more honest than I had been. The reason so many women are willing to accomplish that which is no less a desecration in marriage than it is out of marriage is because so few of them are capable of honest, bare-faced thinking. They wear a veil over their minds. They have a piety for deceiving themselves, even when they have no other form of piety.

To become just yourself, to behold yourself, divested of every subterfuge, is the most appalling disillusionment that can come to any man or any woman. I suffered this. I yielded the point at last, having squandered love.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

IT WAS the night after our return to Millidge. Father and Francis had retired, father dragging his wings, very sad, very silent. Neither of us offered any explanation of why we had returned so soon. Francis was curious, but I met him with such an expression of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth that he forebore to ask any questions. A defeated woman is one of the most formidable creatures in this world. She has nothing to lose and she has reached that stage of defiance when even her guardian angel falls back abashed and waits in some trepidation for the next issue.

The house was quiet. The night intolerably hot. We were in the midst of the August drought. I stood at the window of my room looking out at the garden in the moonlight. It had been neglected in my absence. Everything was parched, the leaves of the rosebushes covered with dust. All the little flowers ragged and dirty-faced like motherless children! The yellow lilies stood at half mast, fainting in the sultry air. The ground was dry and baked. The hose at-

tached to a hydrant lay like a long worm across the walk.

I sighed, drew the curtain, and went to bed, reflecting about what I must do to-morrow, not what I wanted to do, but what I should be obliged to do. I had come to that place in living that we all get soon or late, where there is no longer any choice. I would call up Mrs. Buck-haulter and tell her what a perfectly grand time we had had at Atlantic City, how much improved father was. This lie had to be told. I would tell it, and get it off my mind. I would go over to see Alice if I had time and tell another one there. The house must be put in order. Molly had been very careless. The garden would have to go. It was past hope anyway.

So I filled my mind with just duties, closing every door to the flowering hopes of love and adventure. I was done with all that. I was now really and truly a good woman. Curious what a sorry thing a merely good woman had to be! I wondered if I had chosen it, or if I had had goodness thrust upon me. I thought of a certain class of people I knew in Millidge, professional "uplifters," men and women who gave their entire time to making the world better. They gave sociables in the basement of our church, and invited those of the congregation whom

they never asked to their own homes. They were very cordial there in the welcomes they extended to poor young men, shop girls, grocers' wives, all those outcasts of polite society who belonged to the congregation. They called it "uplifting the masses." They were the officers of Christian Associations, male and female. They worked like beavers in these institutions, very charitable, very helpful, always avoiding the real issue of brotherhood. They conducted municipal reforms in the town which never reformed anything. There is something terribly stationary about the mudsills of society. Ten thousand uplifters cannot raise them. Still it affords a noble and becoming occupation to the uplifters, shows that the evils of the situation cannot be laid at their door. Do not they spend their lives trying to pull the damned old world out of the ditch? Isn't that enough? Does anybody want or expect them to destroy the right order of society by eating and sleeping on terms of equality with these publicans and sinners? Where would they land themselves in that case? Among the publicans and sinners, of course, which is never a proper place for "uplifters."

No, whatever happened, I would not become an uplifter. I was by that as I had been two years

previous about an intellectual career in the Woman's Club of Millidge. I preferred the garden. Upon reflection I would attend to it at once I would neglect everything else for that. I felt a terrible and immediate danger in my present chastened condition, of yielding to the missionary instinct. I had a straight up and down mind which discovered the fallacy, the Pharisaical temptation to which most missionaries and reformers and duty doers to the public yield. Having been guilty of so much, I would not be guilty of that.

"If only it would rain," I sighed and fell asleep thinking of the dowdy zinnias outside, shining like dusty red and yellow buttons in the moonlight.

Sleep sometimes relaxes the reins of reason, so that we accomplish a miracle in a dream far beyond the most brilliant imagination to conceive of in our waking hours. In a moment of time we can dream more than we can tell in an hour and more than we could achieve in a lifetime.

This night as I lay in the stupor of heat and weariness I thought I arose very early from my bed, before any one was stirring, while the stars were still shining. I thought I went a long, long way out beyond the town, between kneeling hills through a meadow where sheep lay regarding me

with silent peaceful eyes. I was going somewhere to buy a day for my garden. I hurried so as to reach the dawn before all the best, dewiest, greenest days were taken.

Presently I was returning, walking in the sunrise of the day that I had bought. There was a majestic hiatus in the bargain. I did not know who sold it to me, nor what I paid. But such a day! Filled with emerald twilight, trees standing like great brothers by the path I trod, the sun mottling the ground with the shadows of their leaves, the scent of a thousand flowers in the air, my bare feet pressing the ferns wet with dew. I thought the sheep came to meet me in the meadow, that a tall green Queen-of-the-meadow standing beside the stream that flowed through it spoke to me. She spoke to me and smiled, nodding her head of white blossoms. I heard her voice distinctly. I awakened startled out of my sleep, wondering, trying to recall what she said. I knew the moment before, understood perfectly. But now, sitting up in my bed in the dark room, I could not remember.

Still there was the smell of wet earth in my nostrils, and of blossoms dew sweetened. I arose and went to the window, parted the curtains and looked out.

The earth of the garden was deep brown as if

a rain had just fallen. Every leaf glistened wet in the moonlight. It was as if God had walked among the flowers and pitied them.

The dawn came on — a pale opal shade rather than a light as I stood there wondering. Sparrows in the elms began to chirrup, filling the air with thin, keen sounds.

As I turned and started back to bed, still dazed with the sweetness of my dream, comforted with the freshness of the garden, I caught sight of the avenue, dry and deep in dust, the leaves upon the trees ashy, the grass upon the pavement withered and pale.

So it had not rained! How then came the ground to be wet in the garden? I was amazed, filled with a strange prescience rather than curiosity.

I said nothing to father and Francis about what had happened. There was a secret between the rose leaves and me, I did not know what it was, but I resolved to keep it.

After breakfast I went out and searched diligently for further traces of that presence which had passed so benignly over my midnight garden. I could find nothing. The hose lay stretched upon the walk as it had been the night before. Every lily stood straight, the cosmos had burst into bloom. There was a green ladder of holly-

hocks in the corner between the kitchen and the hedge that held a red blossom above each leaf. And there was a half-opened bud upon an old Gold of Ophir rosebush beneath my window. The petunias smiled in the sun, the verbenas made a rainbow upon the ground, but not one would divulge the secret of that Providence which had succoured them during the night. They all knew. They admitted that, wagging their bright heads at me.

I busied myself with a hundred tasks, trying to hurry the day to its close. I longed for the night to come again. The night — with its vision, with the little Queen-of-the-meadow bending her green stalk to hail me in the dawn, with this working of miracles in the garden — had become my day. And the day with its round of homely duties had become my dream.

It is foolish ever to despair. Sorrow has sharp elbows but happiness has wings. I was very quiet, very gentle with Molly, chiding her not at all. I was patient with father, getting him off downtown to the club. I wanted the house to myself, a quiet place in which to dream! I would not call Mrs. Buckhaulter, and I would not go to see Alice. This was a trance that must not be broken!

At last the day ended. I amused father. I

was very gay at dinner entertaining Francis with accounts of our experiences at Atlantic City. No one listening could have suspected that anything had happened there to offend or distress me. Father showed a certain keenness of perception in not mentioning Roger Collier, for which I was grateful.

Very early in the dawn of the next morning I awakened from a sleep which had been dreamless in spite of my desire to dream. I arose, slipped softly to the window. I stood a moment hesitating. What if nothing had happened? Why should anything happen? As if in answer, the wind blew the curtains, parted them like two wings, and I beheld upon the sill a Gold of Ophir rose, broken with a long stem, its leaves fluttering in the breeze.

Now I was certain. I had a lover. I knew instantly what I had never suspected before, that a secret lover is the dearest. I experienced to the fullest this joy. I was suddenly made whole, I believed in God. I was ineffably good, sanctified. I loved the whole world. I could have kissed the devil.

Some time during the morning I called Alice over the 'phone. She was surprised that we had returned so soon. Yes, of course, she was very well, but the heat was awful. Her voice sounded

plaintive. I called her "darling," I said I would be over soon, tell her everything, which I resolved not to do.

In the afternoon I went to call on Mrs. Buckhaulter. She was knitting as usual and fussing about the heat.

"How did you find it in Atlantic City?" she asked.

"Warm enough, but the ocean breeze was always refreshing," I answered, and went on at great length to describe the place, the people, the infinite variety of life on the Board Walk.

She seemed preoccupied, I thought. The way an old woman always looks when she is revolving something scandalous in her mind.

"Have you seen Alice?" she asked presently.

"No, how is she?" I inquired. Alice, I reflected, was somehow connected with whatever this was that preoccupied her.

"I never see her, you know, but I hear she is ill. The doctor told Charlie that being a Yogi is a dreadful strain on the nerves, and that if his wife didn't stop trying to ascend, she'd descend into her grave. Said she was about to deep breathe herself out of existence. She's nothing now but skin and bones and a pair of lungs. Charlie told Marcellus yesterday that he was very uneasy about her."

She laid aside her knitting, took up a palm-leaf fan and waved it to and fro.

"It's less expensive in the long run to repent when you have committed a sin, and behave like a normal transgressor, even if the way is hard, than not to repent and to attempt to conceal your malady in occultism. Alice is exactly the same woman she was when she dragged David Brock to his ruin. Only she hasn't got another victim, not a male Yogi in Millidge. Women of that kind cling to what they had desperately until they can truss another victim. I hope Brock is forever out of her reach," she added.

"He seems to have got out of everybody's reach," I answered coolly.

"Have you seen the afternoon paper?" she asked after another pause.

"No, anything in it?" I asked.

"Joy, will you tell Thomas to bring the tea?" she said suddenly, not answering me, an omission that I did not think of until afterward.

When I returned home half an hour later Molly met me in the hall.

"Miss Joy, somebody's just called you over the 'phone," she said.

"Who was it?" I asked.

"He didn't tell his name; 'lowed you'd know who it was."

"Did he say he would call again?"

"No'm, he didn't say what he was gwine to do."

"But who do you think it was?" I persisted.

"I tell you, I don't know, Miss Joy, but it wa'n't your pa, nor Mr. Francis. Your pa called a little while after you left. He said tell you him and Mr. Francis was goin' to the directors' dinner at the Terrace, and they wouldn't be home until late."

"Very well, Molly, you can go. Never mind about dinner. I've just had tea with Mrs. Buckhaulter," I said, dismissing her.

My heart beat as if some one was knocking at the door of it for admission.

It was growing dark. I went into my room and began to dress. I performed a toilet that was a rite. I chose a white organdie, figured with yellow roses and faintly green leaves. I braided my hair and bound it close to my head as I had worn it long ago. I considered my face in the mirror. Surely this was Joy Marr — this slender maiden in the glass. But there was the difference. There is a happiness so secret, so rare and fine that it lends enchantment to the plainest features. I had been a celebrated beauty! Now I was a pale rose — but a rose!

I went out, descended into the garden. I held my skirts close about me, looking this way and

that, not a soul but the moon in sight, every flower with its head up regarding me. Black patches of shadow in the corners, long slits of moonlight between. I moved quickly down the walk to the summer-house, lifting my heels, treading upon toes. Love is like that, in a garden filled with blossoms and darkness, rimmed with moonlight. It is a kind of noiseless piety of the heart. You are near the burning bush of life. All the earth is holy ground. All the trees are priests, every flower a novitiate, a little handmaiden bearing perfume, swinging sweet censers in the air.

A man appeared in the door of the summer-house.

The years slipped like shades that move upon the grass. It was as if I had seen him yesterday, that dark brilliant face — that great form, those massive shoulders, filling the entrance.

"David," I cried.

"Joy!" he whispered, folding me in his arms.

We stood so, as if this was the meaning of the whole world, this embrace.

I lifted my head, looked up into his face, reached one hand up, touched his cheek to make sure. Our lips met, our eyes smiling above.

We went in and sat down upon the bench there.

"I knew I should find you here!" I whispered.

"Yes," he answered. "Saw the account of my

arrival in the paper this afternoon. Tried to avoid that, wanted to surprise you here in the garden," he said, drawing me to him.

"But I have not seen the afternoon paper," I answered, recalling Mrs. Buckhaulter's question, and understanding what she meant.

"How did you know — by the rose upon the window sill?" he smiled down at me.

"By that, yes. I did not dare to believe what I knew, but I did know the moment I saw the garden wet and blooming that you had been here. I knew it by my heart!" I answered.

"And what else do you know by heart?" placing his fingers beneath my chin and lifting my face.

"All the days to come that I shall love you!" I replied solemnly as one recites a creed.

A silence like that which fell upon the first man and the first woman enveloped us. We divided it once with another kiss. Then after a long time, which was only a dear little while, I looked at him mischievously and said:

"David, in case you said anything, what would you say?"

"That I love you!" he answered promptly. "That I've come back for you. That I have thought of you every hour these two years, that I have seen you coming to me through the corn,

in the moonlight, with stars in your hair. That I have seen you in the sun walking between the sheaves, your head brighter than gold, your lips red as poppies, always coming to meet me here this evening."

I trembled before this faithfulness.

"The mind is a queer burying ground. The men and women we were, the things we have done, the thoughts that have sprung up in us like deeds that were never accomplished. All these sink again beneath consciousness, overlaid with days deeper than memory has reached for years. But they are not dead. The dead never die. Suddenly something happens, something natural but incredible until that moment — and behold your casements are flung wide. The past, what you were, so far distant now from what you are, all that you have forgotten, all that you meant but did not achieve, rises like phantom winds, like apparitions blown in from misty nights. Nothing is hidden, not the kiss given so long ago to another, nor even the faintest whisper of love, no transgression, and no goodness. So are we resurrected, I believe. God remembers us, merely remembers, and we rise from our sleeping shrouds, from everywhere and every time, like deeds out of the dust. His fancies created from the Beginning and laid a while.

Seated there with David's arms about me, with the moon making a wedge of light through the door of the summer-house, I was suddenly overwhelmed by this vitality of memory. I beheld the vision of the girl I had been. I saw her so much more distinctly than I did when I was she, and she was I. I could not forget the least of her transgressions, nor a single act in her comedy of errors, which came so near to being a tragedy. I saw myself the unscrupulous adventuress, denying love, seeking mercilessly merely the things of this world. I understood with horror the shadow of a sin which lay between Charlie Archibald and myself, a shadow cast by pain. I thought of Collier — how much nearer I had come then to the abyss! How always I had escaped, not by my own will, but by some law in me that was stronger than my will. I remembered David's infatuation with Alice, and knew that this also was my sin, not his. When women become really good, they know it by this sign, that they assume and become guilty of the transgressions committed by the one they love. It is their involuntary propitiation.

"David," I whispered, with my face pressed close against his breast.

"Yes, dear," he answered, laying his hand upon my head, sheltering me so with tender roughness.

"The past, I wish to be healed of that!" I sobbed.

"We are, dear. It is gone. Kiss me!"

He lifted my face, considered the tears upon it as a priest considers baptismal water, with a kind of joy. I made a smile between for his lips. So were we both healed.

We heard the banging of a screen door somewhere in the house.

"That is father," I said. "Let us go to him."

We passed hand in hand up the walk.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE days which followed David's advent were days of excitement and suppressed curiosity in Millidge. The *Gazette* reviewed his former career in a paragraph too veracious to be complimentary. There was a polite reserve in the social columns. Mr. Brock had been a great favourite in Millidge, and so forth. But at the end of both notices there was an implied question. Where had he been? Had he recouped his fortune? These things must be looked into before you open your doors the second time to a man who had avoided having them closed in his face by leaving town.

A reporter who interviewed him at the Terrace Hotel on the day that I had visited Mrs. Buckhaulter only added to the general confusion.

"Mr. Brock was in fine spirits, but not communicative. He admitted that he had returned to Millidge to close an important deal which would be announced later, probably before the end of the week. A careful search of the records failed to show that Mr. Brock had retained any property in Millidge. His presence in town has

created much activity in business circles. And while Mr. Brock's modesty did not permit him to mention the fact, it was learned at the office of the largest real-estate firm in the city that he had been tendered a position in the company. His unparalleled success some years ago as the president of the the West Meadow Land Company was ample assurance of his future" — and so forth and so on.

The next issue of the paper announced that Mr. Brock had declined this offer, giving as his reason that he was now engaged in a more lucrative but less adventurous business.

"So then," Millidge said to herself, "he is still in the ring, he has substance. We will forget the past. The past is merely an untoward circumstance in the life of this brilliant young financier."

All eyes were cast in the direction of Mrs. Charlie Archibald from this point of view.

Alice remained out of sight. She had not called me over the 'phone since the news of David's return. I wondered a little what she was doing, what she was thinking, but I did not inquire.

Meanwhile David declined the hospitality of the Country Club, and an invitation to a dinner given by the Board of Trade, offering as his excuse that the business which brought him to town occupied all of his time.

And it did. We spent every spare moment together, two ineffably silent and happy beings. Lovers have this advantage, they do not require words in which to express themselves. This is why I cannot set down here what we said. We did not say it! We had no questions to ask each other. We were the answer to all questions, seated upon the bench in the garden. We settled the essential thing that first night when we went into the house and met father hand in hand and astonished him with the assurance that we had always loved each other, that we were to be married presently, and desired his blessing.

Lovers are ludicrous beings or great ones — owing entirely to your point of view and your relation to the situation. Certainly they are out of drawing with what we think are the realities of life, faint exaggerations of eternal bliss in a world of cares and anxieties which deny eternal bliss.

If two ghosts had appeared before father in the library that night he could not have been more amazed.

He laid his cane upon the table, shook hands with David, sat down, looked from one to the other of us and exclaimed:

"What, what did you say, sir?"

"We have come to announce our engagement, Colonel Marr. We ——" David began.

"Now I understand," he murmured, wagging his head, "why Joy was in such a hurry to come back from Atlantic City. At the time I fear I was a trifle dense."

"You were, darling," I laughed, ran forward, knelt beside him, and leaned my head against him in such a manner that I could still watch David smiling down at us in outrageous assurance.

"You might have told me, Joy," father went on in a slightly aggrieved tone. "You might have saved me much anxiety these past two years if you had confided to me your engagement to this young man."

Still he would not withhold his blessing. He hoped we would be happy. Would we inform him in time to dress properly for the wedding, or would we accomplish that in a like manner without regard to the peace and comfort of an old man who did not like to be hurried? He added this whimsically, stroking my head.

We assured him that we would give him at least an hour's notice!

It was not until the following day, in the light of it, that I realized how changed David was. He appeared much older, and much younger. He was tanned to a red-brown, his hands were rough; his clothes strangely unfashionable; his expression as serene as the shade upon a valley

in a day full of sunlight. He was like the masculine prose of a fertile field. I felt this as I sat beside him in the summer-house that there were harvest thoughts in his mind mixed with the lyre of love.

The news of his "deal" was to appear in that afternoon's *Gazette*, and after all it was to be made in father's name:

"Colonel James Marr announces the engagement and approaching marriage of his daughter, Mary Joy, to Mr. David Brock."

We knew that we were spending our last hour secret and sacred just to us, that presently we should be obliged to share at least the knowledge of it with our friends.

The cosmos were a straggling mass of wide pink and white blossoms. The tiger lilies held up chalices in the ardent sun. There was another Gold of Ophir rose swinging fragrance in the air just beyond the door of the summer-house.

David regarded me, smiling gravely as if he said:

"The earth and the fulness thereof is ours!"

And I looked up at him as if I answered:

"No! Never mind the earth. I do not need it now. I am jealous, a little sorrowful when you look too long at that rose!"

Then we began to quarrel tenderly after the

manner of lovers, not in words, he protesting with his eyes, with a nearer smile, I with eyes cast down and lips made sad.

Very well, then, he would put the rose where it belonged — in my hair!

He went out, returned with it, bent over and fastened it in my braids.

So! he stood back regarding me thus enhanced, his head turned to one side.

But still I was not sure. Did my hair need the rose?

Certainly not! It was the rose which needed the golden background!

By way of banishing every doubt, he lifted my face and kissed me. The breach was healed for the moment. We were one again. All done without a word. So foolish! Fresh alarm!

Did he think I was foolish, unreasonable?

Another rift; to be mended in the same manner.

Yet I was not contented. I had still one vanity to satisfy. A woman however beautiful cannot be sure of it until the man whom she loves tells her so. And the plainest woman knows instantly that she is a miracle of loveliness if he declares it.

I suddenly discovered an overwhelming anxiety in my mind. This was the morning of the second day. We had been together the evening before.

We had been in the summer-house since ten o'clock. It must be now nearly twelve. All this time and he had not told me once that I was beautiful. What did it mean — this frightful omission? I was twenty-seven. Heaven save every maid from the damaging consciousness of being within three years of her thirtieth birthday. Suppose he only loved me now because I was at last good, because I loved him? I felt that I could not bear such a compliment merely to my growth in grace. I looked down at myself in plain linen frock. I lifted one hand to my hair wondering if it praised me a little. I looked into the mirror of his eyes and saw myself as through a glass darkly. The inner image they conveyed to him of me, what was it? The question was of vital importance. I must know the worst at once. Had he discovered a wrinkle anywhere? Merciful powers! had I been marred in the face with a line!

I drew away from him, claimed the hand he held.

"David," I began, looking away sadly overcome.

"Yes, dear," he answered, following me, seeking again for my hand, and, failing in that, slipping his arm about my waist.

I hesitated, I sought for the proper words to convey to him my tragic anxiety.

"What is it, Joy?" he asked in tones which somehow revealed to me that he was smiling. I could not bear just then in view of the circumstances to see him smiling.

"David — do you find me greatly changed?" I finished with an effort.

"Yes, dear," he whispered, drawing me to him in a close embrace, turning my head with his hand firmly and pressing my face to his.

Appalling admission! Tears overflowed my eyes and divided my cheek from his. Oh! grief unspeakable — I was changed.

"Joy, darling, what is it?" he exclaimed, holding me now away from him and regarding me seriously.

"I should have known it," I whispered sadly, drooping, refusing to meet his eyes.

"Known what?"

"That I'd be changed. The years, when you have been so lonely, David, the years, they do change you. But it's hard not to be still the most beautiful woman in the world to you!" I sobbed.

"You blessed wonder of all loveliness within and without! Did you think I meant that?" he laughed. He held my face between his hands, kissing me minutely, as if so he would make an end of that doubt forever.

"You are, dear, the millennium of the other Joy — that poor homely maiden who was only the most beautiful girl in the world. Now your loveliness exceeds hers, as — as" — he searched the heavens and the earth for a comparison equal to the emergency — "as the fairest day surpasses the dawn."

I was contented. I sighed, and, looking at him, laughed through my tears.

Of such exaggerations is the making of love composed. The life that we really live never comes up to it. But this is a reflection upon life, not upon love, my masters! There is not enough sorrow in a long lifetime, not enough falseness, nor dishonour, nor grief, nor shame to refute one hour of perfect love. It is the memory of this hour which enables us to endure the rest.

I spent the afternoon alone. I waited for the *Gazette* to pass from door to door in Millidge carrying the news of our engagement. I wondered how it would be received. It was four o'clock, and nothing had happened. I looked over at the 'phone, which stood upon the table as if it was holding its breath. I smiled, thinking of the confusion in Millidge at that moment, of the clatter of tongues, as this one and that one recalled the time years ago when David had been my devoted lover. I flushed, remembering the

gossip that would be added, about Alice and David. Her name had not been mentioned between us. I was sure that if he thought of her at all, it was not kindly. As for me, I held nothing against him, and everything against Alice. This is the nature of woman. It is because they know each other, and because they do not know men. For the first time I thought definitely of our friendship as a bitter bondage from which I now escaped. And this was a part of my happiness, this sense of release from an ignoble relationship.

At last the 'phone rang shrilly, insistently. It went on muttering and clattering after I took up the receiver.

"Hello! Hello!" I answered.

"Is this Main double six?" came a wheezing old lady's voice.

"Yes, Mrs. Buckhaulter; how do you do?" I answered.

"How do I do? Don't ask me how I do, you sly young hypocrite! What does this announcement of your engagement to David Brock mean, in the *Gazette?*"

"Didn't it say anything about our approaching marriage?" I asked laughing.

"Yes, and I want to know what it all means?"

"What it says. Aren't you glad for us?" I asked sweetly.

I heard her rattle the receiver. I knew she was sitting back fanning herself, and trying to adjust what she knew of the past to this present bridal wreath of facts.

"Yes, of course I am glad, my dear," she answered after a pause, "but I think you might have told me, and spared me the spending of so much sympathy upon you these past years that you evidently didn't deserve."

"Forgive me!" I pleaded, resolving that she never should know how much I had needed her sympathy.

"You two have deceived us all. There is not a man or woman in this town that ever suspected such a thing," she complained.

"We always guarded it," I lied happily.

"Where is David? Marcellus has been looking for him all day."

"He was here this morning. I don't know where he is now," I answered.

"Well, do you think you could bring him over to dinner to-night?"

"Thank you, I am sure we'll both be glad to come!"

She was profoundly stirred. She said that her 'phone had been ringing incessantly since two o'clock. Everybody we knew calling to know what on earth it meant. And that she herself

could not be sure until she had seen us. I admitted that she would have no further doubts when she did.

"I'll never have any more confidence in my own eyes again as long as I live. And I must say that you and David might have chosen a more decent way of concealing your interest in each other. However, it serves that woman right!" she added darkly.

Five minutes later "that woman" called me.

"Is that you, Joy?" It was Alice's voice, cool as ice rattling in a glass.

"Yes," I answered dryly.

"I want to see you. Can you come over?" Just that, no more, not even a cup of tea!

I hesitated and answered:

"Why can't you come over here if you want to see me?"

"I am not very well, and I must see you. It is important."

"I'll come," I consented.

It was as if I accepted a challenge.

So long as I live, I can never forget the scene enacted in Alice's parlour between us an hour later. It will remain a little red stain upon my happiness. Sometimes when I look at David, out of whose mind Alice passed long ago like an evil thought, I see her as I saw her that day, the shades

drawn in that darkened room, she the one wild splash of colour in it. An emaciated figure in a red gown, seated upon the sofa. Her hair, which I thought was so abundant, hung in a thin wisp upon either side of her face. The hair-pins were strewn upon the floor; the skin of her face glistening and drawn, a bright round spot of colour in each sunken cheek. Her lips flaming like a red line, her eyes wide and staring, her bosom rising and falling furiously.

"Good afternoon, Alice," I greeted her nonchalantly, pretending not to see what she would not conceal.

"Sit down!" she commanded.

I sat gingerly. We regarded each other in deadly silence. Then to my astonishment she threw up her hands and fell back upon her pillows, shrieking with laughter.

I waited.

"Joy, surely it is a joke, this announcement in the *Gazette* of your engagement to David Brock!" she exclaimed.

"No," I answered.

"Do you mean to tell me that you would marry that adventurer, that — that renegade?"

"I cannot let you call David such names," I answered, rising indignantly to take my departure.

"Oh, don't go!"

She began to weep, her body writhing horribly, her face distorted, the tears making livid lines through the rouge.

"How long have you been engaged?" she sobbed.

"For years and years, I don't know how many!" I answered calmly.

"Oh," she screamed, as if I had stabbed her.

Then suddenly she sat up, tried to compose herself.

"Listen to me, Joy; you must not marry that man! You cannot! For years and years he was my —— "

The door opened. Charlie Archibald walked in. He stood for a moment looking from me to Alice, who leaned back suddenly, still with parted lips, among her pillows.

She raised herself upon one elbow, hollow-eyed but smiling.

"Oh, Charlie," she cried, "have you heard the news? Joy is to be married to David Brock! Isn't it lovely — like — like the end of a story in a book. I'm so happy over it! Joy came over to tell me about it. We have been laughing and carrying on like two girls, you see!"

"Yes, I see," he answered [illegible]. Then turning to me he said:

"I am glad, Joy. I always liked Brock."

He accompanied me to the door, apparently not noticing that I did not take leave of Alice.

That night after we had returned from the Buckhaulters' we went around the house into the garden and sat upon the bench between the crêpe myrtle trees.

We laughed over the incidents of the evening. We had comforted those two old people with the assurance that they had really made the match. We recounted to them over the coffee in the drawing-room how we had really met at the début ball, and how David had drunk the toast and bowed to me in the mirror on the wall in the dining-room. We offered them this proprietary interest in our happiness. We agreed that from the beginning there had never been a doubt in our minds of the love which began with this salutation. They were amazed, delighted. They thought young people were slyer in these matters than they had been in their young days. We were obliged to wait with suppressed impatience while they told of their own courtship.

Now, at last, we were here again in the right place, in the garden, beneath the moon, attended by lilies in waiting.

"Joy," said David, "you have not asked me where or how we shall live after we are married."

This was true even further than that. I had not even thought how we should live. The world with its vain pomp had passed utterly and forever from my mind. This is the truth; we are all better than we know, unless something reveals it to us. At last I knew this good of myself. I had arrived properly in the eternal order of things.

"So we are together, David, it does not matter," I answered gravely.

"Listen, dear," he said, kissing me. "When I sold the mine of which I have told you, and came to Millidge to invest the money, I had still a little land, so poor, so remote from everywhere, that it was of no value. It is a valley between sunrise and sunset hills. They are covered with a forest, filled in the spring with the lavender mist of red buds and laurels and dogwood. A road winds up from the valley into the woods, a green tunnel beneath the overlapping branches of the trees. There is green shale showing through the soil, as if the earth would make nothing, not even the stones that were not the verdant colour of life in that place. There is a spring between great gray boulders and ferns growing beside it in the brown leaves. And above the spring there is a tiny house. I have named it the House Upon the Rock. There is where you

and I will live. We shall live there and work, I in the valley, you in the house upon the rock. We ——"

"And, David," I interrupted, "are there sheep in the valley, in a meadow in the valley with a stream running through it? Sheep that lie in the dawn with their quiet eyes fixed upon the eastern horizon?"

"Why, yes, dear! How did you know that?" he answered.

"And is there a very tall green Queen-of-the-meadow growing somewhere in the shallows of the stream?"

"Of course, though I do not remember seeing any there. It is a good place for them."

"Yes," I answered, "there is only one. She spoke to me."

"Spoke to you? What do you mean, Joy?"

"David," I whispered, "that night you came and watered the garden I dreamed that I arose from my bed and went a long way out beyond the town to buy a day. I passed through a valley between hills, over a meadow with sheep in it. I saw the ferns beside the spring — I, oh! David, we are going to live in the place where I went to buy a green and dewy day for my garden."

We regarded each other in solemn awe. A

miracle received us. He supposed that since we had been led so carefully to this hour and in this manner that it was a part of the divine plan that we should seal the whole transaction with another kiss. And we did.

THE END

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